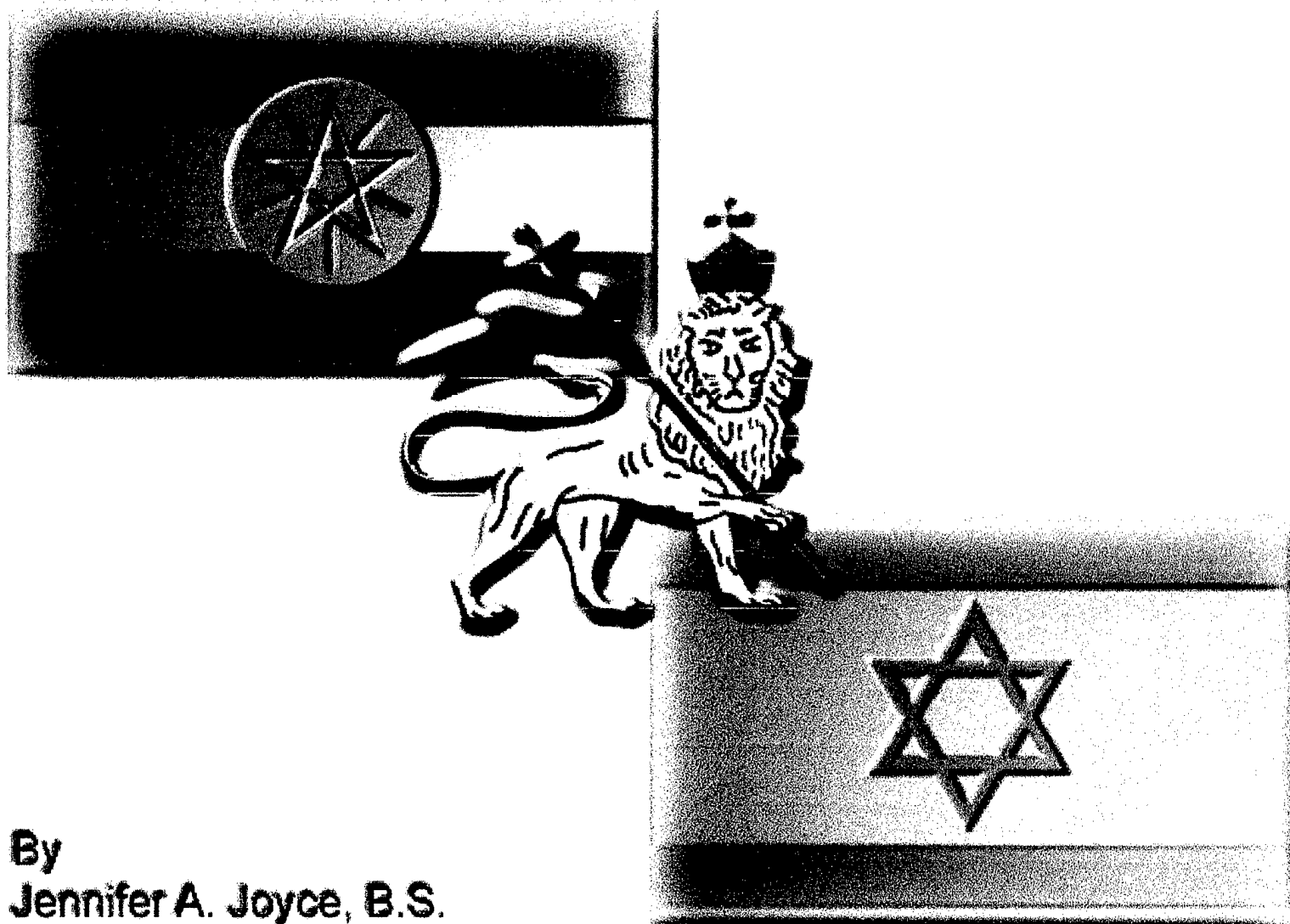


# ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL 1955 - 1998



By  
Jennifer A. Joyce, B.S.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis "Ethiopia's Foreign Relations With Israel: 1955-1998," examines the nature and the impact of the diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. From the rupture in relations during the Yom Kippur War in 1973 to the drama of Operation SOLOMON in 1991, the nature of the relationship has changed. What remains constant is the pragmatic adherence to national interests as the driving forces behind foreign policy.

Early relations between Ethiopia and Israel were amicable and based on a sense of shared heritage and common interests. A mixture of idealism, economic cooperation, and technical assistance characterized the relations in the 1950s and 1960s. However, pragmatic acknowledgement of the geopolitical realities held greatest sway in the foreign policy arena. Thus, when Ethiopian interests shifted to border security and Israel became more concerned with freedom of the Red Sea, Israeli military assistance was added to the economic programs.

The military relationship grew stronger into the early 1970s until Ethiopia severed relations with Israel in 1973. However, a year after the Ethiopian monarchy was toppled by an armed revolt, the new rulers turned to Israel for military assistance against Eritrean insurgents. This tacit military relationship was the hallmark of the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the late 1980s, vacillation on the Ethiopian Jews' issue led to the massive airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, Operation SOLOMON in 1991. Soon after the airlift, Ethiopia was taken over by the rebel forces. The new Ethiopian government quickly reestablished formal relations with Israel.

The 1990s have seen a rebuilding of diplomatic and economic relations between Ethiopia and Israel. While the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has slowed growth, trade between Ethiopia and Israel is likely to continue its steady rise. Israel and Ethiopia maintain a close diplomatic alliance that will continue to grow into the future.

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HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Ethiopia's Foreign Relations with Israel: 1955-1998

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

of

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in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts

Department of African Studies

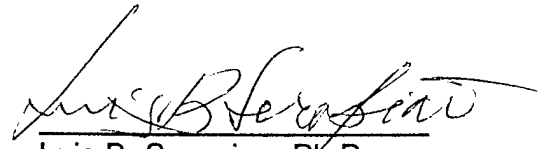
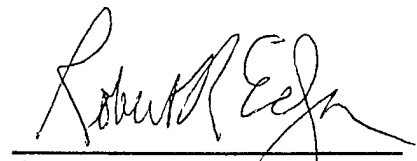
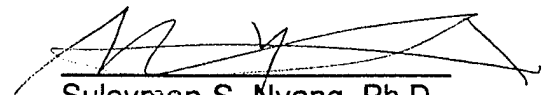
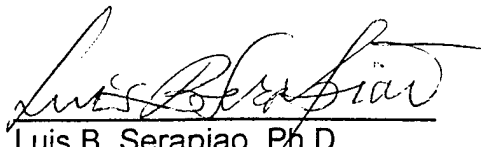
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**CHAPTER 1**  
**THE PROPOSAL AND ITS SETTING**

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### The Statement of the Problem

There is perhaps, no figure so enigmatic in ancient sub-Saharan Africa as the Queen of Sheba. The Bible speaks of her visiting King Solomon in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> While her homeland may never be certainly identified, Ethiopian texts identify the Queen of Sheba as an ancient Ethiopian monarch.<sup>2</sup> The Queen is believed to have initiated and established ancient Ethiopian foreign relations with the Kingdom of Judaea in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>3</sup> Her foreign policy initiatives with King Solomon mark the beginning of a relationship between Ethiopia and Israel.

A lot has changed since the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

What have remained steadfast are the cultural and historic ties between the people of Israel and Ethiopia. Ethiopian Jewry, the Solomonic dynasty, and even Ethiopian Christians maintained strong emotional ties to biblical Jews.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Jews in the Diaspora were deeply interested in the status of the



**Figure 1-1: King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba**

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 10:1.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest surviving version of the story can be found in the *Kebra Nagast* (*Glory of the Kings*), a 13<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopian text. See Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her Only Son Menelik: Being the 'Book of the Glory of the Kings' (Kebra Negast)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932). This is a translation and commentary of this story in *Kebra Negast*.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 27. Because this paper will be discussing Israel, this text will use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) vice the Christian convention of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini).

Ethiopian Jews and the Ethiopian Empire itself. These emotional and cultural ties have served as a basis for the modern political relationship, which began to develop in the 1940s. Despite these emotional ties, Ethiopian and Israeli leaders have both remained pragmatic in their foreign policies.

The strength of the relationship, however, has waxed and waned over the fifty-two-year history of modern Israel. In fact, the relationship between Ethiopia and the modern state of Israel began on a rather sour note. In 1947, when the United Nations General Assembly was voting on the establishment of the State of Israel, Ethiopia abstained. While there are many reasons for this startling lack of support for Israel in her hour of need, the Ethiopian government's fear of reprisal from its Islamic neighbors was the prime motivator. Emperor Haile Selassie, while eager to maintain relations with Israel, was supremely aware of the delicate position of a Christian Ethiopia surrounded by Muslim states. This knowledge would continue to influence Ethiopian foreign policy with Israel into the 1990s.

Starting in 1955 with the establishment of official diplomatic relations, Israel provided a variety of technical and economic assistance to Ethiopia. Ethiopia was not the only African recipient of Israeli technical assistance, although it did receive a larger share than most other African nations. The Zionist movement, which had brought the modern state of Israel to fruition, was keenly interested in helping other oppressed people. As Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist Movement, said in 1898, "...once I have witnessed the redemption of

---

<sup>4</sup> The term Falasha (Amharic for landless people) has been used previously to refer to Ethiopian Jews. However, this term is considered offensive by Ethiopian Jews who call themselves, Beta Yisrael (House of Israel). Therefore, Ethiopian Jew or Beta Yisrael will be used in this text.

Israel, my people, I wish to assist in the redemption of the Africans.”<sup>5</sup> As African nations achieved independence, Israeli advisors were ready to assist in everything from road construction to training doctors.

While Zionist ideals played a large part in motivating Israeli relations with Africa, there were other more practical considerations. Israel needed allies to help combat the strong anti-Israel/pro-Arab lobby in the United Nations. Additionally, the establishment of political ties with other countries served to legitimize Israel in the international sphere.

Ethiopia held a special place in Israel's international strategy. Ethiopia's location on the Red Sea ensured that the Red Sea would not become an Islamic lake. Additionally, Israel needed a close ally in the Middle East region. Ethiopia, for its part, was concerned with growing unrest from Muslim-backed Eritrean insurgents.

Technical and economic assistance was augmented by military assistance in the late 1960s due to the threat from Eritrean insurgents in northern Ethiopia. Israel provided training and equipment to help maintain the territorial integrity of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. Despite this special military and economic relationship, Ethiopia again turned its back on Israel at a time when it needed an ally the most. In October 1973, confronted by mounting Arab pressure and in a move of Pan-African solidarity, Ethiopia severed official relations with Israel in

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<sup>5</sup> Theodor Herzl, as quoted in Olusola Ojo, Africa and Israel: Relations in Perspective, from the Studies in International Politics, Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 27.

reaction to the Yom Kippur War.<sup>6</sup> Once again, Selassie's concern with the reaction of his Arab neighbors figured largely in his foreign policy decisions.

Despite this devastating blow to the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel, tacit ties remained. Diplomatic lines of communication remained open, as did trade relations. However, Israeli military advisors were forced to leave Ethiopia.

In January 1974 a group of young military officers overthrew the Ethiopian monarchy, eventually establishing the Dergue regime. The coup effectively severed all relations between Israel and Ethiopia. Under Major Mengistu, who eventually gained control of Ethiopia, unpublicized relations with Israel were renewed in 1975 for the specific purpose of gaining military assistance. However, these ties were severed in 1978 when the Soviet Union, having intervened in the Ogaden, strengthened ties with the Mengistu regime.<sup>7</sup> Despite the official pronouncements, limited military to military relations remained in place throughout the Dergue regime.

In spite of the atrocities and human rights violations associated with Mengistu's regime, Israel remained committed to relations with Ethiopia. One of the prime motivators for this commitment was a renewed interest in the Ethiopian Jews throughout the Jewish community. Amicable relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s allowed the immigration of thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. As it became increasingly evident that Mengistu's regime was sure to falter under the pressure from insurgents, Israel began to seek negotiations with the insurgents'

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<sup>6</sup> Arye Oded, Africa and the Middle East Conflict (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), pp. 224-225.

leaders to discuss the status of the Ethiopian Jews under the forthcoming Ethiopian government. Through these negotiations and agreements with the Mengistu government, Israel was able to airlift thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in May 1991.

With the end of the civil war and the fall of the Dergue in 1991, Ethiopia renewed formal ties with Israel. In the last decade the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel has blossomed. Though the diplomatic relationship has had its share of ups and downs, a friendship remains. Economic ties have been renewed and complex issues, such as the fate of the Ethiopian Jews, have been worked out.

### Objective

This thesis will examine the nature of the diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Israel from 1955 to 1998. First, it will examine the motives and influences impacting Ethiopia's relationship with Israel. Several questions and issues need to be addressed. For instance, what are the major factors that influenced Ethiopian and Israeli foreign policies toward each other? How did these factors evolve as the leadership and needs of the countries changed? Having established the factors behind the diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Israel, this thesis will endeavor to describe the nature and the impact of the relationship between the two countries from 1955 until 1998.

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<sup>7</sup> Haggai Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 180.

## Main Thesis

Ethiopia's relationship with Israel has been pragmatic through three distinctive phases: the first phase was in the 1950s and 1960s when the relationship was based on a mixture of idealism, economic cooperation and technical assistance; the second phase was in the 1970s and 1980s when the relationship turned to tacit military cooperation; and the third phase was in the 1990s when the relationship focused on the economic relationship.

## The Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study will be limited to the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. While the role of the Soviet Union and the United States as Super Power actors in the Horn of Africa can not be denied, it will not be the focus of this study. However, any acts by either country, which directly influenced the central relationship, will be addressed.

Additionally, the scope of this study will be limited to the period between 1955, when Ethiopia first recognized the state of Israel, and 1998, when Ethiopia entered into war with Eritrea. Informal relations prior to 1955 will not be included except to set the stage for the formal relations that blossomed in 1955. Events following the outbreak of hostilities in 1998 will not be addressed due to the unavailability of reliable, accurate information.

A third limitation is the biased nature of some of the resources available. A large percentage of the works on the subject of Israeli foreign policy is vehemently opposed to Israel. These texts fail to provide objective arguments and largely provide only one side of the story.

A fourth limitation is the availability of certain government resources. The military relationship between Israel and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s was kept a secret. Most of the documentation discussing the specifics of the military interaction remains classified by the Israeli and the Ethiopian governments.

### Definitions

*Pragmatic* refers to the overarching results-oriented attitude, specifically, emphasizing the meeting of needs rather than being concerned with the theory. Within the scope of this study, pragmatic refers to the emphasis by both nations on realpolitik and on maintaining national interests rather than subsuming national interests to historical, cultural, and emotional ties.

## **THE REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

### Historical Overview of African Relations with Israel

During the 1960s and 1970s a great deal was written about Israel and its relationship with various African countries or Africa as a whole. Most of these pieces were praises of Israeli technical assistance programs and the application of the Israeli model in developing countries. The texts of Shimeon Amir and Leopold Laufer examine the history and nature of cooperation between Israel and

developing countries.<sup>8</sup> In providing an in-depth understanding of the nature of Israeli technical cooperation, the authors use examples from around the world. Additionally, they treat continents as unitary actors. This approach provides only ancillary mention of Israeli technical cooperation with Ethiopia.

One benefit of these texts, as well as publications from the Division of International Cooperation within the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is the statistics that are provided.<sup>9</sup> These statistics serve to show how technical assistance programs in Africa compare to those in Asia and Latin America. Succinctly put, Israel's programs in Africa far outweighed those in other parts of the developing world.

Mordechai E. Kreinin recognized the importance of the African-Israeli technical cooperation and dedicated his text, Israel and Africa: A Study in Cooperation, exclusively to its study.<sup>10</sup> His text provides an intensive look at the economic side of the cooperation between Israel and Africa from the 1950s until the time of publication, 1964. Kreinin provides a snapshot of the feelings surrounding this cooperation immediately prior to what was to become the 'hey day' of cooperation between Israel and Africa. One limitation of this work is his concentration on West Africa, where he did most of his field research. Therefore, there is little mention of the nature of early cooperation between Ethiopia and Israel.

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<sup>8</sup> See Shimeon Amir, Israel's Development Cooperation with Africa, Asia, and Latin America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974) and Leopold Laufer, Israel and the Developing Countries: New Approaches to Cooperation (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> See Division of International Cooperation, Israel's Programme of International Cooperation (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Mordechai E. Kreinin, Israel and Africa: A Study in Technical Cooperation (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964).

Another article by Kreinin, published over ten years later, can be found in Israel in the Third World edited by Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson and published in 1976.<sup>11</sup> This book is a compilation of articles written by scholars, businessmen and diplomats. As the title implies, these articles examine the motivation behind Israel's foreign policy in the Third World. While there is a broad approach, as in the Laufer and Amir studies, there are several articles of importance to this study.

Ehud Avriel, Kreinin, and Moshe Alpan take a look at the early years of Israeli technical assistance programs in Africa.<sup>12</sup> Since hindsight is twenty-twenty, these articles are more critical. Avriel, a former Israeli Ambassador to Ghana, speaks of the "verve and enthusiasm" with which both Africans and Israelis embraced the cooperation movement.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to acknowledge the Pan-African motivations for breaking ties with Israel in 1973. Kreinin, on the other hand, looks at the technical side of the cooperation and some of the failures of this cooperation. Alpan's article examines both the emotional/political aspects discussed by Avriel and the technical aspects discussed by Kreinin in a search to answer the question of uniqueness in the relations between Israel and Africa. Of notable relevance to this study, Alpan notes the geopolitical motivations for close ties between Israel and Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson, Israel in the Third World (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Moshe Alpan, "Israeli Trade and Economic Relations with Africa"; Ehud Avriel, "Israel's Beginnings in Africa"; and Mordechai E. Kreinin, "Israel and Africa: The Early Years," in Israel in the Third World, ed. Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Avriel, "Israel's Beginnings," p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Alpan, "Israeli Trade," p. 100.

Other articles in Israel in the Third World explore the nature of the relationship between Israel and Africa following the break in relations in 1973. Specifically, articles by Shimeon Amir, Susan Aurelia Gitelson, and Benjamin Rivlin and Jacques Fomerand look at a host of questions that arose from the break in relations.<sup>15</sup> As each author points out, economic ties remained intact between Israel and several countries in Africa following the severance of official relations. What is not mentioned in these articles is the status of Ethiopia-Israel relations following 1973. As Haggai Erlich points out, Israel and Ethiopia maintained an economic relationship despite the severance of official ties and renewed military ties in 1975.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1970s and the 1980s the focus of research on Israeli-African relations was on the prospect of restoring ties following the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979. Ignacio Klitch, Thomas Land, Arye Oded, and Appiah Sackey wrote articles in scholarly journals that discussed the pro's and con's for African states considering renewing relations with Israel.<sup>17</sup> Noticeably absent from their discussions was Ethiopian relations with Israel. The articles do, however, provide insight into how Israel was perceived in the international arena and how this may have influenced the Ethiopia-Israel relationship.

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<sup>15</sup> Shimeon Amir, "Challenge and Response: Israel's Development Cooperation -1974-5"; Susan Aurelia Gitelson, "Israel's Africa Setback in Perspective"; and Benjamin Rivlin and Jacques Fomerand in Israel in the Third World, ed. Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> See Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East.

<sup>17</sup> See Ignacio Klitch, "Israel Returns to Africa," Middle East International (4 June 1982): 11-12; Thomas Land, "Black Africa Poised to Restore Relations with Israel," New Outlook vol. 23 no 2 (March 1980): 10-11; Arye Oded, "Africa, Israel and the Arabs: On the Restoration of Israeli-African Diplomatic Relations," The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations vol. 6 no 3 (1982-83): 48-70; and Appiah Sackey, "Israel and Africa," Africa 182 (October 1986): 36-37.

Ali Mazrui also examined Israeli-African relations during this time in his text, Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change.<sup>18</sup> This book as a whole provides fascinating insights into the forces and motivations behind African foreign policy. Of interest to this study, Mazrui dedicates an entire chapter to discussing African relations with Middle East. More specifically, Mazrui examines the shift of African alliances from Israel to the Arab world in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He discusses the different motivations for the shift, including that of Ethiopia.<sup>19</sup>

Israel's continued relations with apartheid South Africa in the 1980s were a major sticking point in renewal of relations between African states and Israel. While there was a great deal written about this topic, James Adams, Efraim Inbar, and Kunirum Osia provide three very insightful works.<sup>20</sup> These authors point out that Israel and South Africa are outcast countries, isolated from the international political system. As such their foreign policy decisions do not have to be widely accepted. Osia highlights the impact this "politics of expediency" had on Israeli relations with Africa.

One of the more recent texts devoted to the African-Israeli relationship is Africa and Israel: Relations in Perspective by Olusola Ojo.<sup>21</sup> This text provides an excellent examination of the history of Israeli relations with Africa. Ojo discusses the cause and effect of the changes in relations up until 1988 (the time

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<sup>18</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> See James Adams, The Unnatural Alliance (New York: Quartet Books, 1984); Efraim Inbar, Outcast Countries in the World Community, Monograph in World Affairs, vol. 12, book 2 (Denver: University of Denver, 1985); and Kunirum Osia, Israel, South Africa and Black Africa: A Study of the Primacy of the Politics of Expediency, (New York: University Press of America, 1981).

of publication). He also includes two case studies of relations with Israel: one of apartheid South Africa and the other of his country, Nigeria. While this text is useful for its compilation of much of the pertinent material about relations between Africa and Israel, there is only limited discussion of the relationship between Israel and Ethiopia.

Another recently published book is Israel and Africa: Forty Years, 1956-1996 by Samuel Decalo.<sup>22</sup> This book, published in 1998, is a compilation of articles by Decalo, with the first one having been written in 1967 and the last one in 1996. These articles provide both background and a current frame of reference for Israeli relations with Africa. However, as with so many other texts on the subject, there is no specific discussion of Ethiopia.

Joel Peters does provide some specific discussion of Ethiopian relations with Israel in his 1992 publication, Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship.<sup>23</sup> While this book is not focused on the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel, it does mention the relationship within the context of the relationship between Africa and Israel. More useful to this study is a discussion of the resumption of diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and Israel in 1989. Peters places this diplomatic move in the context of other African nations which were re-establishing ties with Israel.

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<sup>21</sup> Ojo, Africa and Israel.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Decalo, Israel and Africa: Forty Years, 1956-1996 (Gainesville, FL: Florida Academic Press, 1998).

## Ethiopian Foreign Relations with Israel

As the previous discussion has shown, a great deal has been written about the African relationship with Israel. There are some studies that provide more in-depth discussion of the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Amongst these are the studies of Israeli military aid by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Israel Shahak.<sup>24</sup> Both authors examine the Israeli arms trade, with specific attention to the military assistance provided to Ethiopia. Additionally, the Beit-Hallahmi volume addresses the political reasoning behind Israel's military assistance to Ethiopia. However, neither author addressed why Ethiopia sought military assistance from Israel.

Haggai Erlich, on the other hand, provides an in-depth discussion of Ethiopia's relationship with Israel.<sup>25</sup> While the bulk of the text is devoted to a historical analysis of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Arab Middle East, there is a chapter discussing Israel. Erlich points out a unique relationship that so many other scholars failed to recognize. He details the military relationship that developed in the last years of the Emperor's reign. More importantly, Erlich discusses the political climate in which this relationship developed. The role of religion and geopolitics in the Ethiopia-Israel relationship is highlighted, as is the role of the Arab world in pushing for the end of the relationship.

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<sup>23</sup> Joel Peters, Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) and Israel Shahak, Israel's Global Role: Weapons for Repression (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc., 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East.

Erlich concentrates more succinctly on the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel in his article published in Ethioscope in 1995.<sup>26</sup> As Erlich confesses in the introduction, this short article presents only a few generalizations about the relationship. Erlich traces the relationship from its modern origins in the 1950s to the migration of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1991. Additionally, Erlich discusses the issues constraining the relationship in 1995. Throughout the article, Erlich brings out the major factors contributing to the state of the relationship at the time. As such, this article provides an excellent background for this study.

While Erlich examined the relationship as a whole, Paul Henze looks at a specific incident in 1991.<sup>27</sup> Henze, in one of many RAND reports he wrote about the Horn of Africa, discusses the negotiations surrounding Operation Solomon, the airlift of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Henze's discussion also illuminates how these negotiations became the basis of the relationship between Israel and the new government of Ethiopia.

Key to these negotiations, and integral to the understanding of the Ethiopia-Israel relationship, was the role of the United States and the Soviet Union. While there are countless texts discussing the Super Power involvement in the Horn of Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, Terrence Lyons and Colin Legum and Bill Lee provide two texts that illuminate the role of Israel.<sup>28</sup> The alliance

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<sup>26</sup> Haggai Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel," Ethioscope vol. 1 no 3 (June 1995): 36-40.

<sup>27</sup> Paul B. Henze, Ethiopia: The Fall of the Dergue and the Beginning of the Recovery Under the EPRDF (March 1990-March 1992) (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977) and Terrence Lyons, "Great Powers and Conflict Reduction in the Horn of Africa," in Cooperative Security: Reducing Third World Wars, ed. I. William Zartman and Victor A. Kremenyuk (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

between Israel and the United States was a key factor influencing Ethiopian relations with Israel. In fact, Ethiopia's tug-of-war between the Super Powers had a direct effect on the seesaw relationship with Israel during the 1970s and 1980s.

Two other works discussing Ethiopian foreign policy which emphasize the role of the Super Powers are Marina Ottaway's Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa and Bereket Habte Selassie's Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa.<sup>29</sup> Both of these works are excellent resources for studies relating to Super Power influence in Ethiopia. While, neither provides an in-depth discussion of the Israeli dimension, both provide excellent background information on Ethiopian foreign policy issues during this time.

Roberto Aliboni looks at the role of the Super Powers from a different perspective in his book, The Red Sea Region: Local Actors and the Superpowers.<sup>30</sup> As the title implies, the emphasis here is on the Red Sea rather than the Horn of Africa. As a result, Aliboni's text provides a discussion of Super Power interest in Ethiopia in the perspective of the Middle East Conflict. As in the books by Ottaway and Selassie, there is little direct discussion of the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. However, Aliboni does provide considerable discussion of the geopolitical influences on Ethiopian foreign policy.

Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate also discuss factors influencing Ethiopian foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Their text provides an excellent discussion of

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<sup>29</sup> Marina Ottaway, Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982) and Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Roberto Aliboni, The Red Sea Region: Local Actors and the Superpowers (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> Yohannis Abate and Mulatu Wubneh, Ethiopia: Transition and Development in the Horn of Africa (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 186.

Ethiopia's transitions under different government and different phases of war, from the end of Imperial rule in the early 1970s to the revolution of the Dergue. An entire chapter of this text is dedicated to Ethiopian international relations with a significant discussion of relations with Israel.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

According to Samuel Decalo, a prolific author of articles on relations between Israel and Africa, a research gap exists in the systematic treatment of Israel's relations with any specific state.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between Israel and Ethiopia is a case in point. A great deal has been written about the components of this study - Israeli foreign relations and Ethiopian foreign relations. However, the scholarly work discussing their relationship with each other is extremely limited. While there is some literature available about Israeli relations with Africa as a whole, there is only limited discussion of the relationship with Ethiopia. One notable exception is the aforementioned article by Haggai Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."<sup>33</sup> This article provides a generalized discussion of the relationship between the two countries. This study will provide a more thorough examination of the relationship.

Meanwhile, many of the texts about Ethiopia concentrate on its civil war relationship with Eritrea, or its relationship with the Super Powers with only peripheral mention of its relationship with Israel. Additionally, since the end of the

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<sup>32</sup> Decalo, Israel and Africa.

<sup>33</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

Cold War, there has been little scholarly work on Ethiopian relations with Israel. This study of the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel will fill this gap.

## **THE METHODOLOGY**

### **The Data**

Much of the research for this project was conducted during a trip to Israel in January 2000. During this time research was conducted at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and through interviews conducted in Jerusalem. Both primary and secondary data were used in this research. The nature of these types of data is given below.

#### **Primary Data**

The primary data for this research consists mainly of government reports and documents, many of which were available from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs library in Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> While a great many Israeli government reports and documents were available through the internet, a thorough investigation of the primary data required an examination of documents that were not available electronically. Thus, extensive research was conducted in Israel.

Additionally, economic and immigration data published in the Statistical Abstract of Israel has been used. Furthermore, in as much as possible,

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<sup>34</sup> Guide to Selected Documentation on the Relations between Israel and Ethiopia, ed. H. S. Aynor (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986).

interviews were used. Interviews were sought with former and current diplomats who were directly involved in the relationship between Israel and Ethiopia. Specifically, the researcher was able to interview the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa Avraham Toledo, the Israeli Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa Menashe Tzipori, and the former Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia Asher Naim.

It should be noted that a wealth of information and data is available in Ethiopia. However, the current international conflict with Eritrea prevented research from being conducted in Ethiopia.

### **Secondary Data**

The secondary data for this research consists mostly of press reporting, journal and internet articles, and books. Most of this material is available at university libraries in the Washington, D.C. area as well as the Library of Congress. Research was also conducted at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The Hebrew University is home to the Harry S Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, which houses an extensive archive of documents and articles relating to Israeli relations with Ethiopia.

## **OUTLINE OF PROPOSED STUDY**

The narrative portion of this thesis will consist of three chronologically arranged chapters. Chapter 2, entitled "Ethiopian Relations With Israel, 1955-

1972,” examines the origins of the relationship between Ethiopia and the modern state of Israel, discusses the major factors that influenced the development of formal relations, and traces how the relationship evolved in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter 3, “Ethiopian Relations With Israel, 1972-1989,” examines the reasons behind the break in relations between Ethiopia and Israel, the foreign policy of the Mengistu regime, and the impact of the Ethiopian Jew issue on their relations. Chapter 4, “Ethiopian Relations With Israel, 1989-1998,” continues the discussion of the relations between the two countries during the Mengistu regime. Specifically, this chapter looks at how Israeli relations with Ethiopia changed during the final years of the Mengistu regime, how relations between Ethiopia and Israel were renewed following the fall of Mengistu, and how normalized relations have renewed technical assistance and economic cooperation programs.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL,**  
**1955-1972**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the 1950s and 1960s, the early days of their relationship, Ethiopia and Israel had a great deal in common. Both were developing nations that had recently shaken free from their World War II British Mandates. The two nations also both saw themselves as besieged by their hostile Arab neighbors. Additionally, both bordered the Red Sea and were highly concerned with freedom of navigation within the Red Sea. Ethiopia and Israel also shared a sense of history based on their common Biblical heritage, with the Ethiopian monarchy claiming descent from King Solomon. These common interests were at the heart of the early relations between Ethiopia and Israel. However, the common interests did not take precedence over the national interests of the individual countries. Despite historical affinities, the diplomatic, economic, and military ties that developed during this time were based on the realities of Middle East politics. This chapter will examine the origins of the relationship between Ethiopia and the modern state of Israel, discuss the major factors that influenced the development of formal relations, and trace how the relationship evolved from 1955 until 1972.

## EARLY ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

### Pre-1948

As an Emperor of Ethiopia's Solomonic Dynasty, Haile Selassie traced his descent from the union between King Solomon of Judaea and the Queen of Sheba around 820 BCE. This Solomonic heritage figured prominently in Ethiopian symbols. The Emperor's crest bore the Lion of Judah, as did the Ethiopian flag.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Emperor himself was called the Lion of Judah.

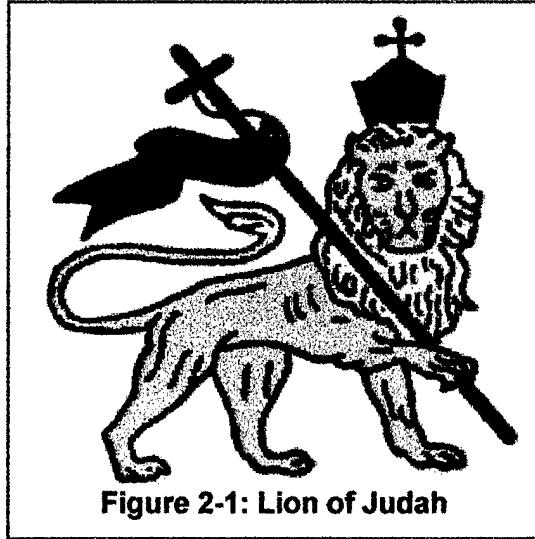


Figure 2-1: Lion of Judah

Thus the Ethiopian monarch and the people of Ethiopia shared a historical sense of affinity for the Jews of Palestine based on the Emperor's Solomonic lineage.

Five years after being crowned Emperor, Haile Selassie came under attack from an invading Italian army in 1935. Mussolini's troops made their way to the capital, Addis Ababa, forcing Haile Selassie to flee the country in 1936 and seek refuge in the Jewish Rehavia quarter of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The Emperor and his family spent a year living in Jerusalem where they "were received with sympathy and understanding by the Zionist leadership in Jewish Jerusalem."<sup>3</sup>

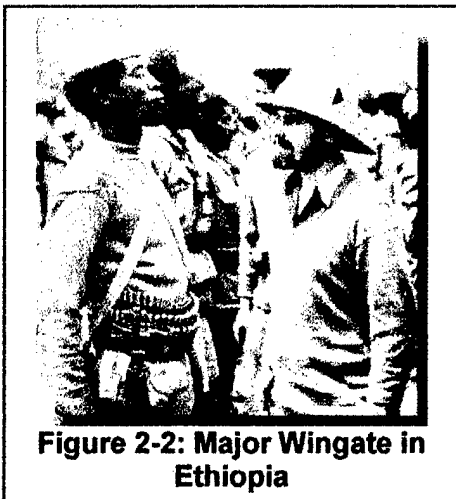
<sup>1</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> "Ethiopia renews ties," *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 June 1989

<sup>3</sup> *Guide to Selected Documentation on the Relations between Israel and Ethiopia*, ed. H.S. Aynor (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986), p. 2.

Jewish Palestine became actively involved in Ethiopia at the end of 1940.<sup>4</sup>

It was at this time that Major Orde Wingate, a British officer, was appointed "to lead a small force of Sudanese troops, reinforced by Ethiopian irregulars, in a minor diversionary movement against strong Italian positions in northern Ethiopia."<sup>5</sup> In Palestine Wingate had worked with the Haganah and founded the "Special Night Squads" to fight Arab terrorists in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> Wingate selected Jewish former members of the "Special Night Squads" as his staff during the guerilla campaign in Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> In January 1941, Haile Selassie joined Wingate's forces and, after a dramatic victory over the Italian occupiers, triumphantly



**Figure 2-2: Major Wingate in Ethiopia**

returned to the liberated Addis Ababa with Wingate and his Jewish staff in May 1941.<sup>8</sup>

Ethiopia remained on the Israeli agenda following this rousing victory against Italian colonialism. During the remainder of World War II and in the post-war period, Haile Selassie sought to rebuild his army and

administration that had been destroyed during the war of liberation. "Jewish Palestine was near and provided the only practical and friendly source of technical and professional assistance."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Haggai Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel," *Ethioscope* 1, 3 (June 95): 36-40.

<sup>5</sup> *Guide*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-4. The Haganah became the backbone for the Israeli Defense Force when the State of Israel was declared in 1948.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

## Israeli Statehood

Despite these early friendly relations, Ethiopia remained cautious in the foreign policy arena. Like his predecessors, Haile Selassie was supremely aware of his country's position, surrounded by its traditional enemies, its Muslim neighbors. According to Kassim Shehim, Haile Selassie "tried to avoid direct political provocation or military confrontation and used inter-Arab rivalries to neutralize Ethiopia's enemies."<sup>10</sup>

This policy of non-provocation was instrumental in deciding Ethiopia's action in the United Nations (UN) in 1947 and 1948. In November 1947 Ethiopia avoided confrontation by not voting on the UN Resolution which partitioned Palestine and granted Israel statehood. In 1948, when the UN General Assembly voted on the question of Israel's membership in the UN, Ethiopia opposed it.

Ethiopia's voting behavior in the UN bore fruit in 1950. By not supporting Jewish causes in the UN, Ethiopia hoped to secure Arab and Muslim votes that it might need in future efforts to incorporate Eritrea.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in 1950, the UN passed a resolution creating a federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

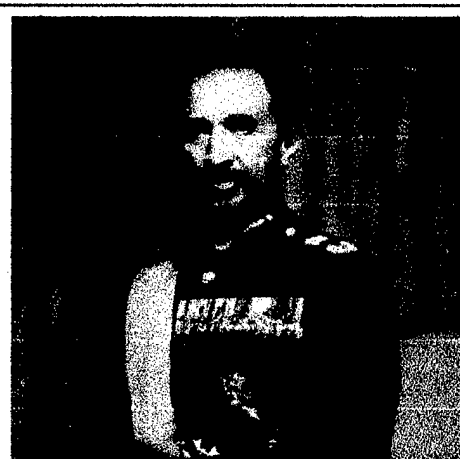
<sup>11</sup> Kassim Shehim, "Israel-Ethiopian Relations: Change and Continuity," Northeast African Studies 10 (1988): 25-37.

## FORMAL RELATIONS

### The Beginnings

As early as 1952 there was trade between Ethiopia and Israel. These economic ties opened the door for more formal relations. In 1955 Israel sent a Goodwill Mission to Ethiopia to meet with the Emperor.

On 22 November 1955, in a meeting with Haile Selassie, Mr. Arthur Lourie, Deputy Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "pointed out the necessity of strengthening these relations (between Israel and Ethiopia) especially in view of the Arab and Moslem Imperialism which is discernible in the Middle East."<sup>12</sup> The Emperor agreed on the importance of strong relations between the two countries. However, Haile Selassie remained cautious. Ethiopia hoped to avoid high-profile relations with Israel for fear of provoking her Arab neighbors.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2-3: Ever Cautious – Emperor Haile Selassie**

Thus, Ethiopia extended only de facto recognition of Israel.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Haile Selassie balked at the idea of exchanging ambassadors and agreed to exchange consuls.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Aide Memoire in Guide, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Haggai Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> Aide Memoire in Guide, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Motivating Factors

Many different factors influenced Ethiopia and Israel at the beginning of their formal relationship. Zionism and socialism were certainly at play in Israel's policy with the majority of sub-Saharan nations. They also played a role in Israel's policy with Ethiopia. However, the driving factor behind the relations between the two countries was the geopolitical realities of the Middle East.

### ***Zionism***

From the very beginnings of the Zionist Movement there was mention of Jewish brotherhood with Africans. Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist Movement, wrote in 1898:

There is still one other question arising out of the disaster of the nations which remains unsolved to this day, whose profound tragedy only a Jew can comprehend. That is the Africa question. Just call to mind those terrible episodes of the slave trade, of human beings who merely because they were black were stolen like cattle, taken prisoner, captured and sold. Their children grew up in strange lands, the object of contempt and hostility because their complexions were different. I am not ashamed to say – that once I have witnessed the redemption of Israel, my people, I wish to assist in the redemption of the Africans.<sup>16</sup>

While Herzl is not specifically addressing relations with Ethiopia, the sentiment of shared oppression was meant to extend to all of Africa.

Ehud Avriel, Israel's first ambassador to Ghana, also expressed the idea of brotherhood with Africans. In discussing why Israel sought relations with

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<sup>16</sup> Theodor Herzl, as quoted in Olusola Ojo, *Africa and Israel: Relations in Perspective*, from the Studies in International Politics, Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 27.

African nations, he said, "we were looking for kindred souls, people in hope of justice, equality, purposeful social development."<sup>17</sup>

Ethiopia, for its part, also related to Israel in terms of brotherhood and shared history. The historical links through the Solomonic dynasty as well as ties between Ethiopian Christians and Jerusalem drew many Ethiopians towards Israel. Most Ethiopians were proud of their emperor's heritage and were deeply sympathetic to the Israeli cause. Indeed, the biblical-Christian heritage, coupled with the Ethiopian-Zionist ethos, created in Ethiopians a sense of brotherhood with the Israelis.<sup>18</sup> However, this emotional factor would prove to be only a catalyst for the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel.

### ***Socialist Idealism***

Another concept that was a factor in Ethiopian relations with Israel was socialist idealism. Israel sought to export its brand of non-dogmatic, pragmatic socialism.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, many newly independent African nations were looking for an alternative to capitalism, which had resulted in their being colonized in the first place. According to Gitelson, "originally Israel's aid had been attractive to Ghana, Tanzania and other African countries because the country was a viable socialist model for developing states."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ehud Avriel, "Israel's Beginnings in Africa," in *Israel in the Third World*, ed. Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>19</sup> Susan Aurelia Gitelson, "Israel's African Setback in Perspective," in *Israel in the Third World*, ed. Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), p. 182.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185

Additionally, at the time, Israel saw itself as a developing country with, as Golda Meir said, a duty to work within its capacity to close the gap between the developed and the developing countries.<sup>21</sup> As Moshe Decter points out, Israel's self-perception as a developing country meant that it "was in a unique position to understand the problems of other developing countries and to cooperate with them in assistance programs."<sup>22</sup> It was believed that the Israeli experience was universal and could be learned by others around the world.<sup>23</sup> Economist Mordechai Kreinin wrote "Israeli know-how is considered more useful for new nations than knowledge obtainable in Europe and North America. Far from being a drawback, the recency of Israel's development experience gives Israeli advisors an edge over their counterparts from other countries."<sup>24</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s Ethiopia, like the rest of Africa, was on the lower end of the development scale and sought to benefit from Israel's experience and know-how. However, socialist ideologies were incompatible with Ethiopia's monarchical feudalism. Thus, socialist idealism was only a marginal factor in the relations between Ethiopia and Israel.

### ***Geopolitical Realities***

While Zionism and socialist idealism played a large role in motivating Israeli relations with most of sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia was a very different

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<sup>21</sup> Shimeon Amir, Israel's Development Cooperation with Africa, Asia, and Latin America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Moshe Decter, To Serve, To Teach, To Leave: The Story of Israel's Development Assistance Programs in Black Africa (New York: American Jewish Congress, 1977), p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Amir, Israel's Development, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Mordechai E. Kreinin, Israel and Africa: A Study in Technical Cooperation (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), p. 9.

situation. Zionism and socialist idealism played only a minor role in motivating Ethiopia and Israel to forge strong relations. Instead, the dominant motivating factor was geopolitical reality. Specifically, the security pressures faced by these two non-Muslim nations in the Middle East compelled Ethiopia and Israel to be allies.

Ethiopia viewed itself as a Christian island in a sea of Muslim countries. Ethiopia's traditional enemies were her Muslim and Arab neighbors. At various times throughout its history Ethiopia has had to fend off attacks from these neighbors. The twentieth century has been no different. Thus, in foreign policy, Haile Selassie was eager to find "a powerful non-Muslim ally, ready to come forward in the event of an Ethiopian-Islamic confrontation."<sup>25</sup> However, Haile Selassie also hoped to maintain a low profile and avoid provoking his neighbors. Thus, it was necessary to keep any relations with Israel as low profile as possible.<sup>26</sup>

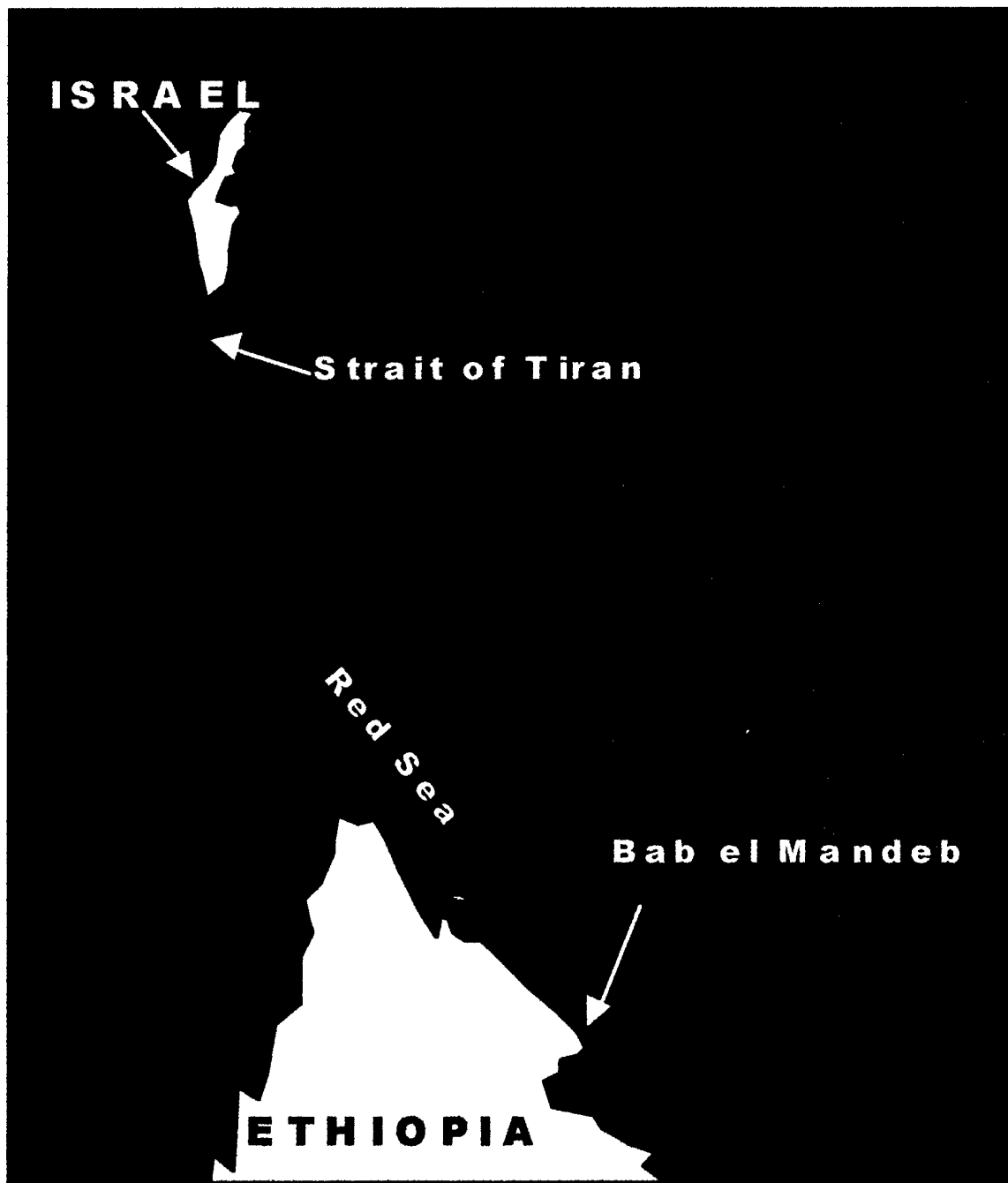
The Emperor was also wary of the Muslim minority within Ethiopia. Specifically, he was concerned that his powerful Muslim neighbors, such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, might try to incite revolutionary movements among Ethiopia's Muslim minority. As Emperor Selassie told a British journalist in 1957, "Colonel Nasser is trying to stir up the large Muslim minority with the aim of dismembering this Christian kingdom."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>26</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Emperor Haile Selassie, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 134.



**Figure 2-4: Map of the Red Sea area**

It is interesting to note that, while for much of its history Ethiopia's population was largely Christian, the "incorporation of large Muslim territories into the Ethiopian Empire at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century" significantly changed the demographics.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Muslims represent a sizable minority with modern estimates ranging from 40 to 50% of the population.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of this statistical fact, the feeling of being a Christian nation threatened by her Islamic neighbors continued to influence Ethiopian foreign policy.

The Emperor initially sought friendship from other non-Arab countries in the East, Iran, Turkey, and India. However, these nations had little interest in establishing formal relations with Ethiopia. Israel, on the other hand, had strong geopolitical reasons to seek a friendship with Ethiopia.

Agyeman-Duah has argued, "For Israel, the importance of friendship with Ethiopia lay in the latter's strategic location in the Middle East region."<sup>30</sup> This strategic location, in part, is due to its location on the Red Sea. The UN resolution in 1950 that federated Eritrea and Ethiopia also gave Ethiopia control of the Eritrean seaports and waterways. After the 1957 Sinai Campaign in which Israel asserted control over the Strait of Tiran, the Red Sea became an important shipping route for Israel.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Seifuddin Adem Hussien, "Islam, Christianity and Ethiopia's Foreign Policy," Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 17 (April 1997): 129-139.

<sup>29</sup> CIA World Factbook, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/et.html> and U.S. Department of State Background Notes: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, March 1998, [http://www.state.gov/www/background\\_notes/ethiopia\\_0398\\_bgn.html](http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/ethiopia_0398_bgn.html).

<sup>30</sup> Baffour Agyeman-Duah, The United States and Ethiopia: Military Assistance and the Quest for Security, 1953-1993 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 102-3.

<sup>31</sup> Moshe Alpan, "Israeli Trade and Economic Relations with Africa," in Israel in the Third World, ed. Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), p. 101.

Additionally, as part of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is in a position to control the Bab el Mandeb Straits. This narrow (approximately 15 and a half miles wide) strait is a potential choke point at the southern end of the Red Sea and is one of the narrow lifelines for Israeli shipping.<sup>32</sup> Arab domination of the strait would cripple Israeli commerce. By strengthening Ethiopia against her Arab and Muslim enemies, Israel hoped to prevent the Red Sea from becoming an Arab lake.<sup>33</sup>

Ethiopia was also strategically important to Israel on a larger scale. In 1959, Israel's Prime Minister David Ben Gurion formulated what he called Israel's "periphery strategy."<sup>34</sup> This strategy was based on the idea of an informal alliance between Israel and countries on the periphery of the Middle East. The designated countries, Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, were all non-Arab countries. As Peters points out, "common to all was the fear of Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic expansion and subversion which threatened the territorial integrity of their countries."<sup>35</sup>

In June 1966, the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres echoed Ben Gurion's early goal of strengthening Ethiopia into a regional power. In an interview Peres listed his eight goals for Israel's foreign policy. The first was "To build a 'second Egypt' in Africa, that is, to help convert Ethiopia's economic and

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<sup>32</sup> Agyeman-Duah, *The United States*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Israel's "fears were thoroughly aroused in 1973 by an attempt in the Strait of Bab el Mandeb to deny passage to a ship carrying an Israeli cargo and earlier, in 1967, when Egyptians had tried to block the Strait of Tiran." Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>35</sup> Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 9.

military strength into a counterforce to Egypt, thereby giving Africans another focus.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus, building a friendship was mutually beneficial for Ethiopia and Israel. Israel would work to strengthen Ethiopia, both economically and politically, to ensure safe passage in the Red Sea and to gain an ally in the Middle East. Ethiopia would provide ports for Israeli ships and be an ally in the Middle East. However, pragmatic as always, Haile Selassie would keep the friendship low key so as not to provoke his Arab neighbors.

## **ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

From the beginning of formal relations between Ethiopia and Israel, one of the main venues for cooperation was economic and technical assistance programs. Israeli technical assistance programs gained wide popularity throughout Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Ethiopia, because of its geopolitical importance to Israel, was one of the main benefactors of Israeli aid. Improvements to Ethiopia's economy also opened up trade possibilities between the two nations. This section will look at some of the technical assistance and economic cooperation programs and their results.

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<sup>36</sup> Shimon Peres, as quoted in Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 51.

## The Programs

Israel's approach to development is advancing practical, simple, relatively limited and achievable projects.<sup>37</sup> The aim of Israeli technical assistance programs is to build on lessons learned from the Israeli experience. The basic tenet is that the human factor is the key to development. Therefore, projects stress the development of human resources.<sup>38</sup> "In all these programs Israel has emphasized training and education, even above concrete projects. It has taken this approach because of the "multiplier effect" of producing trained personnel who, in turn, are able to instruct others in their own countries, thus proliferating the numbers of skilled people."<sup>39</sup>

One of the first large projects of technical assistance was the Fishery Development program, which began in 1957 after the Sinai Campaign re-opened the Straits of Tiran for Israeli shipping. This project sought to modernize the Ethiopian fishing fleet, teach modern trawling techniques, locate the most productive fishing grounds in the Red Sea, and install refrigeration equipment to preserve the fish in extreme temperatures of the Red Sea. The goal was to help the fishermen of the Ethiopian coast to produce a surplus that could be exported to Israel. Consequently, Ethiopia was making better use of its natural resources, increasing its exports, and increasing foreign currency reserves. Additionally, Israel had a new, reliable source of food.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Amir, Israel's Development, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Division of International Cooperation, Israel's Programme of International Cooperation (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1970), p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Decter, To Serve, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Another program of cooperation was the modernization of the Ethiopian bus system. In 1961 the Ethiopia government requested Israeli help in improving its national bus service. In

response, Israel sent advisors from Egged, Israel's bus cooperative. "For four years the general manager and the

**Table 2-1: Ethiopian Bus Company<sup>41</sup>**

<u>1960</u>	<u>1964</u>
Near Bankruptcy	\$220,000 (net profits)
12 m passengers	22 m passengers

technical manager of the country's major bus company were Israelis supplied by Egged. Bus operations were completely reorganized and modernized. By 1964, when the experts left, the bus company had pulled itself up from near bankruptcy to a substantial and ever-growing profit."<sup>42</sup> Additionally, bus service was greatly improved, with more routes added and more passenger miles recorded. Israeli "advisers introduced training courses for local personnel, sent department heads to Israel for special training at Egged headquarters and implemented recommendations for cheap fares for low-income areas."<sup>43</sup>

Israeli programs in Ethiopia were not limited to economic projects. Humanitarian development was also a key component. Trachoma is a viral infection of the eye, which, if left untreated, can lead to blindness. The treatment however is very simple and in 1966, Israeli launched a program for the eradication of trachoma in Ethiopia. At the time there was an estimated 30 to 90 percent incidence of trachoma in various districts in Ethiopia. "An Israeli

<sup>41</sup> Leopold Laufer, Israel and the Developing Countries: New Approaches to Cooperation (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1967), p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> Decter, To Serve, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

physician working for the Ethiopian Ministry of Health planned and organized a countrywide drive in which teachers were taught to administer the curative tetracycline ointment to afflicted students.”<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Ethiopian medical staffs were taught about the detection and treatment of the disease.

In coordination with the trachoma eradication effort, Israel also worked to improve the education available to blind children. Ethiopian teachers were sent to Israel to learn how to teach blind children. The emphasis was placed on vocational skills that would allow the children to some day lead productive independent lives.<sup>45</sup>

Another area of assistance was the academic program. Israel's program of academic assistance in Ethiopia was the largest of its kind in Africa. From 1959 until 1973 over 200 Israelis served as teachers and administrators at Ethiopian Universities and institutes. As in other Israeli projects, an important aspect of this project was emphasis on training and teaching Ethiopians to replace Israeli advisors.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Laufer, Israel and the Developing Countries, p. 129.

<sup>45</sup> Decter, To Serve, p. 52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

## Economic Results

**Figure 2-5: Ethiopian Trade With Israel, 1952-1960<sup>47</sup>**



Israel's growing industrialization led to expanded trade with Ethiopia. Israel exported finished items and technology-related materials (medical equipment, electronic products, etc.), while Ethiopia exported mainly raw materials including beef and coffee.<sup>48</sup>

In many cases Ethiopian firms exporting to Israel were joint ventures based on Israeli technical or managerial experience. Some of the firms founded by Israel in Ethiopia include: a pharmaceutical plant in partnership with Assia-Teva from Israel and local investors; Incoda, an Israeli firm which exported

<sup>47</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1958-1961). Information for 1953 unavailable.

<sup>48</sup> Gitelson, "Israel's African Setback," p. 185.

Ethiopian Beef; a cotton farm; and a skin-pickling plant in partnership with local and American investors.<sup>49</sup>

As Figure 2-5 above shows, the bulk of the trade flowed from Ethiopia to Israel. However, imports from Ethiopia amounted to only 1.5% of Israel's total imports.<sup>50</sup> Ethiopia maintained a comparative advantage over other African nations because of the proximity between Eilat, Israel's port on the Red Sea and Masawa, Ethiopia's port on the Red Sea.<sup>51</sup>

## CHANGING NEEDS

In the 1960s Ethiopia's needs began to change. The Eritrean insurgency and the border conflict with the Somalis created an urgent need for improvements to the Ethiopian military. Because both the Eritreans and the Somalis were receiving assistance from the Arab world, Israel was eager to help strengthen the Ethiopian military. This section will examine how the needs of the Ethiopian military changed and how Israel met those changing needs.

### Eritrean Insurgency

Ethiopia's attitude toward Israel changed subtly in the early 1960s. Ethiopia became increasingly interested in military assistance from Israel. Two major developments led to this shift in attitude. First and foremost was Somalia's

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<sup>49</sup> Alpan, "Israeli Trade," p. 110 and Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection, p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Alpan, "Israeli Trade," p. 107.

independence in 1960.<sup>52</sup> Somali irredentism was a specific threat to Ethiopian internal security as concern grew over the Somali claim to the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.

The second development also led to increased trepidation about internal security. Selassie witnessed the rising tide of Arab nationalism, which began with Gamel Nasser's revolution in Egypt.<sup>53</sup> It was these Arab nationalists who supported and trained Eritrean secessionists.

Following World War II, the question of the disposition of Eritrea, a former Italian colony, arose. Many options were weighed; however, in the end, the UN voted in 1950 to join Eritrea with Ethiopia as a federated state.<sup>54</sup> This federation was short-lived as Ethiopian expansionist policies led to the forced integration of Eritrea as Ethiopia's 14<sup>th</sup> province in 1962.<sup>55</sup>

During the ten years of federation with Ethiopia, Eritrean exiles in Egypt began to foment opposition to the Ethiopian government.<sup>56</sup> As the peaceful opposition became increasingly impotent, the Eritreans began the armed struggle for an independent Eritrean state. On September 1, 1961 the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), led by Egyptian exiles, fired the first bullet in what became a 30-year war for independence.<sup>57</sup>

This increased threat to Ethiopian security led Haile Selassie to seek increased military aid from the Israelis. Israel, acknowledging the Arab and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Agyeman-Duah, The United States, p. 103.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> Okbazghi Yohannes, Eritrea, A Pawn in World Politics, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 177.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

Muslim threat to Ethiopia, agreed. In return the Emperor granted de jure recognition of Israel in 1961. However, while Israel quickly upgraded its diplomatic representation in Ethiopia to Ambassador, Ethiopia maintained a consulate in Israel.<sup>58</sup>

Nasser and his Pan-Arabist goals became a more direct threat in 1962. In September of that year, Nasser's army landed in Yemen, launching what would become a five-year war to decide the future of the Arab Peninsula, the Red Sea, and the Middle East. Erlich points out that "the journal of Egypt's armed forces declared that Egypt was seeking to make the Red Sea an Arab sea."<sup>59</sup> The Emperor feared that a pan-Arab victory in Yemen would embolden the Somalis and Eritreans threatening Ethiopia's territorial integrity. The Egyptian landing in Yemen was the impetus behind Haile Selassie's move to annex Eritrea in November 1962.<sup>60</sup>

In its early years, the ELF was primarily Muslim, garnering support from Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia at various times.<sup>61</sup> When, in 1963, Nasser stopped aiding the ELF, they quickly found a new home in Damascus.<sup>62</sup> Muslim support for the Eritrean insurgents continued into the 1970s when an estimated 250 Eritreans were being trained in Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) camps.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Guide, p. 5

<sup>59</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East, p. 139.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> James E. Dougherty, The Horn of Africa: A Map of Political –Strategic Conflict, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Inc., 1982), p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East, p. 153.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

The Islamic nature of the Eritrean secessionist movement provided a rationale for Israeli military assistance to Ethiopia. The involvement of the PLO only served to heighten Israeli assistance to the Ethiopian military. The 1960s and 1970s would be marked by an ever-increasing military assistance from Israel to Ethiopia.

### Military Assistance

Toward the end of the 1960s Israel sought to formalize the military assistance programs with an agreement on military cooperation. Such an agreement would have improved Israel's strategic access in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. However, Arab hostility and the perceived repercussions from such an act dissuaded Selassie from agreeing.

By 1966 the Israeli military mission in Ethiopia numbered about 100, with most of the assistance going to the army, but some to the air force and the navy.<sup>64</sup> Israeli military assistance at this time included "the training of the various sections of the Ethiopian armed forces in specialized activities like commando tactics, parachute jumping, and advice on security services. Israel also became involved in the paramilitary training of the Emergency Police, criminal investigations, and instructions at the Police College at Aba Dina."<sup>65</sup> Perhaps one of the most important tasks was the training of the border patrol commandos.

<sup>64</sup> Abel Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66," Journal of Modern African Studies 9 (1971): 165-87.

<sup>65</sup> Agyeman-Duah, The United States, p. 104. The Emergency Police Force was "an elite counterinsurgency group of 3,100 men (plus about 40 Israeli advisors) established to operate in Eritrea." Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection, p. 51.

Israeli police, experienced in border warfare against Arab commandos, did this training.<sup>66</sup>

"When Israel's victory in the Six-Day War (1967) relieved Ethiopia of an acute sense of Arab siege, the Israeli diplomatic community in Addis Ababa grew to become second largest mission abroad after New York."<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Israel's military presence grew to be the second largest in Ethiopia, coming behind the United States whose diplomatic and military presence in Ethiopia was its largest in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Despite this growing diplomatic and military relationship, Ethiopia remained wary of her neighbors. Ethiopia did not want to publicize its relationship with Israel and asked the Israeli trainers not to wear military uniforms during parades and other special occasions. "Many aspects of Israeli military assistance to Ethiopia were kept secret. The emperor was willing to accept the aid but did not want to rupture with Muslim neighbors which seemed possible if Ethiopia closely identified herself with Israel."<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, in the late 1960s Ethiopian behavior in the UN revealed an increased wariness of the Arab threat. Specifically, at the "UN Fifth Emergency Special Session of July 1967 of Israeli aggression in the Middle East, Ethiopia's voting behavior on the fifteen issues debated demonstrated extreme circumspection and even neutrality."<sup>70</sup> Despite this benevolent neutrality, the Arab countries escalated their material and moral support for anti-imperial forces

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<sup>66</sup> Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid."

<sup>67</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>68</sup> Shehim, "Israel-Ethiopian Relations."

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

in the early 1970s. "At the Fourth Islamic Foreign Ministers conference in Libya in March 1973, conferees railed at what was described as Israeli attempts to extend its domination over the Red Sea through its links with Ethiopia. The conference finally threw the support of the Islamic nations behind the struggles of the Eritreans for self-determination."<sup>71</sup>

### Continued Technical Assistance

As the 1970s began, Israel's military aid to Ethiopia was of paramount importance. However, the technical assistance and economic programs continued. According to Israel's Program of International Cooperation, a publication of the Division of International Cooperation, several programs were in progress as of 1969. These are listed in Table 2-2.<sup>72</sup>

**Table 2-2: Programs in Progress in 1969<sup>72</sup>**

- 6<sup>th</sup> and final year of program to establish faculty of engineering at University of Addis Ababa
- fisheries development program
- advice on road construction
- an advisor in Addis Ababa on traffic engineering problems
- advice on port maintenance
- first year of cotton farm at Abadir
- project to establish school of tourism officers
- advice on establishment of blood banks in cooperation with Ethiopian Red Cross
- advice on national housing development
- geological survey and mapping with four Ethiopian teams each led by an Israeli geologist
- development of pharmaceutical service
- advice on organization and marketing handicrafts
- agricultural advice in Tigre Province

Other programs began in the early 1970s. One such program was the Ethiopian-Israeli Joint Microbiology Program at Haile Selassie University in Addis Ababa. This program started in

<sup>70</sup> Agyeman-Duah, *The United States*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin* 10, 3 (April 1973): 2778-2780.

<sup>72</sup> *Israel's Foreign Relations: Basic Documents 1948-1972, Provisional Draft*, ed. Meron Medzini (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1972), p. 895.

the 1970-71 academic year and was planned to continue for five more academic years. With participants from Haile Selassie University, Hebrew University, and the Division of International Cooperation, they created an independent, full-fledged department of microbiology staffed by Ethiopian teachers.<sup>74</sup>

Other academic programs like the Joint Microbiology program continued to flourish in Ethiopia. However, starting in 1967, there was a decline in the number of Israelis in residence at Ethiopian universities. This was a result of the success of the Israeli programs to train Ethiopians to take over the programs."<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between Ethiopia and Israel sprang from friendship and a shared sense of insecurity, surrounded by hostile neighbors. From these beginnings grew a spirit of cooperation in economic and technical assistance programs. In the 1960s Ethiopia began to feel more threatened and sought military assistance from Israel. Israel, for its part, was eager to strengthen its ally in the Middle East. As the 1970s began, Ethiopia and Israel had formed a strong diplomatic, economic, and military relationship based on the geopolitical realities of the Middle East. The socialist idealism and Zionism that marked the early days of the relationship was always tempered by pragmatism.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Amir, Israel's Development, pp 54-55.

<sup>75</sup> Laufer, Israel and the Developing Countries, p. 135.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL,**  
**1972-1989**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the 1970s began, relations between Ethiopia and Israel were as strong as they had ever been. Trade was growing and Israeli military assistance had become an integral part of the Ethiopian military. However, the drama that unfolded in 1973 and 1974 would permanently change these relations. 1973 saw the rupture in formal relations. A few months later, a 'creeping coup' began the process of deposing the Emperor. While the new regime had different interests in the foreign policy arena, the relationship with Israel remained pragmatic. Ethiopia and Israel maintained a tacit military relationship and economic ties in all but the worst of the Mengistu days. This chapter will examine the reasons behind the break in relations between Ethiopia and Israel, the foreign policy of the Mengistu regime, and the impact of the Ethiopian Jew issue on their relations.

## **ETHIOPIA BREAKS WITH ISRAEL**

The 1970s saw a subtle change in the politics of the Middle East. Nasser died in September 1970 and was replaced by Anwar el-Sadat. Sadat abandoned Nasser's pan-Arabism, putting aside notions of regional grandeur.<sup>1</sup> Instead, Sadat focused on the Egyptian conflict with Israel. This conflict would have dramatic consequences for the politics of the Middle East. This section will

examine events of 1973 and how pressure from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Yom Kippur War caused Haile Selassie to break formal ties with Israel.

### Reasons Behind the Break

Prior to the Arab attack on Israel in October 1973, Ethiopia had come under increasing pressure to sever relations with Israel. Much of this pressure came from the Arab nations represented in the OAU, including Libya, Algeria, Sudan, and Egypt. At the OAU's Tenth Assembly in Addis Ababa, "a Libyan proposal to place Ethiopia's relations with Israel on the agenda of the summit received staunch support from Algeria and other Afro-Arab states."<sup>2</sup> Arab nationalists also campaigned for moving the headquarters of the OAU from Addis Ababa to possibly Cairo.<sup>3</sup> While neither of these efforts were immediately successful, Ethiopia felt the pressure.

Arab pressure for Israel to sever relations with Israel also came in the form of aid to Somalia and Eritrean insurgents. Additionally, there was pressure from within the Ethiopian government. Radical, often younger, officials within the Ethiopian government began to support the Arab cause.<sup>4</sup> While Ethiopia had come to rely on Israeli technical assistance, specifically in the military realm, the pressure to sever ties was mounting.

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<sup>1</sup> Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin* 10, 5 (15 June 1973): 2843-2851.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Gitelson, "Israel's African Setback," p. 196.

In October 1973, Ethiopia crumbled under the pressure. While Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were the aggressors of the Yom Kippur War the resulting Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory vilified Israel among many African nations. Israel's friends south of the Sahara chose to support their Egyptian (and African) brother and severed their ties with their friend, Israel. "Up to five countries a day broke diplomatic relations with Israel."<sup>5</sup> Only Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland maintained relations with Israel.<sup>6</sup>

On 23 October 1973, Ethiopia joined her African brothers and severed diplomatic relations with Israel. (See Table 3-1.<sup>7</sup>) Haile Selassie pragmatically chose to place solidarity with Africa above friendship with Israel. This was made

**TABLE 3-1: African Nations Break Diplomatic Ties with Israel**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Date of Break</u>
Guinea	06-Jun-67
Uganda	30-Mar-72
Chad	28-Nov-72
Congo	31-Dec-72
Niger	05-Jan-73
Mali	01-May-73
Burundi	16-May-73
Togo	21-Sep-73
Zaire	04-Oct-73
Rwanda	08-Oct-73
Benin	09-Oct-73
Upper Volta	10-Oct-73
Cameroon	13-Oct-73
Equatorial Guinea	14-Oct-73
Tanzania	19-Oct-73
Madagascar	20-Oct-73
Central African Republic	21-Oct-73
Ethiopia	23-Oct-73
Nigeria	25-Oct-73
Gambia	26-Oct-73
Zambia	26-Oct-73
Sierra Leone	27-Oct-73
Ghana	28-Oct-73
Senegal	28-Oct-73
Gabon	29-Oct-73
Botswana	01-Nov-73
Liberia	02-Nov-73
Kenya	08-Nov-73
Cote d'Ivoire	12-Nov-73
Mauritius	01-Jul-76

evident in his keynote address to the OAU Council of Ministers in Addis Ababa in November 1973. The Emperor said, "In demonstrating their solidarity with Egypt and the other states whose territorial integrity has been violated, OAU member

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Land, "Black Africa Poised to Restore Relations with Israel," *New Outlook* 23, 2 (March 1980): 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Appiah Sackey, "Israel and Africa," *Africa* 182 (October 1986): 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, p. 35.

states are committing themselves to uphold the fundamental principles of interstate relations without which there can be neither peace nor progress.”<sup>8</sup>

Ethiopia had at last given in to the sustained Arab pressure and subscribed to the OAU policy to isolate Israel following the Yom Kippur War. However, while Haile Selassie broke official diplomatic relations, he maintained covert lines of communications with the Israeli government.<sup>9</sup>

Haile Selassie was cognizant of the importance of Ethiopia's relationship with Israel. However, the realities of the political situation in 1973 had driven him to sever ties, at least officially. In fact, as Hanan Aynor, Israel's last ambassador to Ethiopia, recalls, “it was a troubled emperor who decided to suspend – not officially sever – relations with Israel.”<sup>10</sup> This thought was echoed in the official announcement made by the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Minasse Haile:

Ethiopia has nothing against Israel for not supplying us with advanced arms. We know you are fighting now for your lives and you cannot spare us anything significant. Every Ethiopian knows your situation and every Ethiopian hopes for your victory, for we know you are right in your war with the Arabs. But we have to take care of our interests, and this calls upon us today to break relations with you. It is not a popular move and we have no doubt that it will help us in the short run only. We hope that the moderate Arabs, the Egyptians, the Moroccans, Tunisia, and Jordan will restrain the radical ones, Somalia, Syria, Libya, who target at us, and that they, the moderates, will not allow them to attack us. ...It is with great sorrow that we do it, and we hope that the breaking of relations will not last long.<sup>11</sup>

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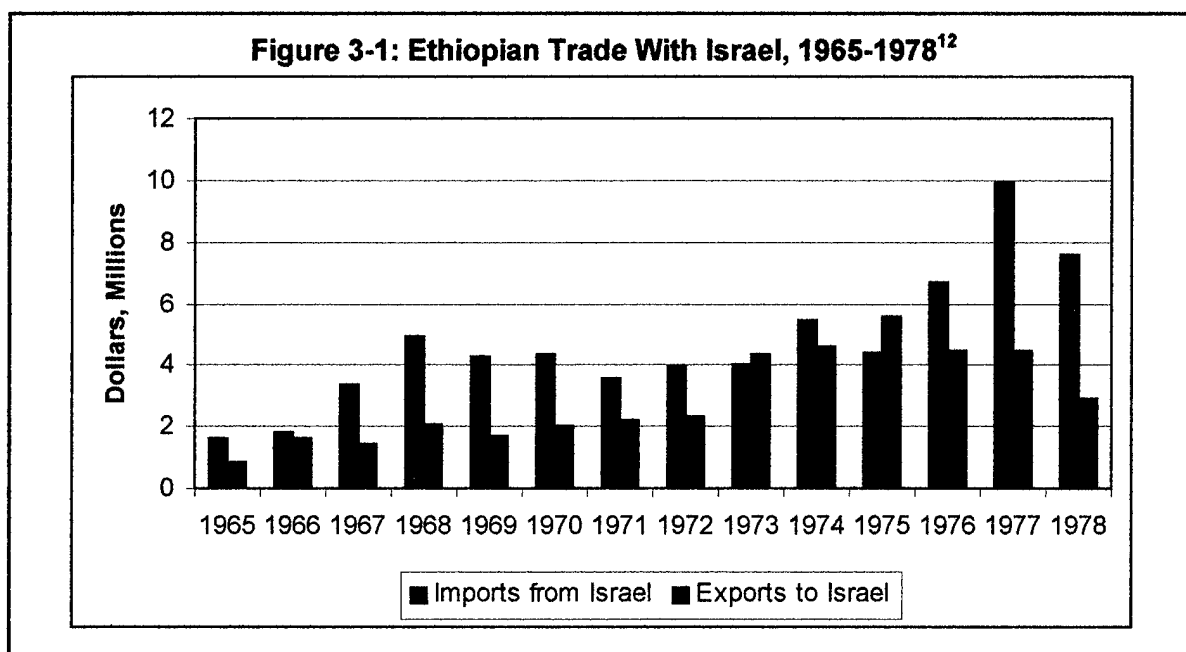
<sup>8</sup> Emperor Haile Selassie, as quoted in Susan Aurelia Gitelson, “Israel's African Setback,” p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Agyeman-Duah, The United States, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> “Ethiopia renews ties,” The Jerusalem Post, 11 June 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East, p. 173.

Erlich argues “there is, indeed, enough evidence to suggest that when Haile Selassie broke relations with Israel in the middle of the Yom Kippur War, he really expected Israel to understand it in a brotherly way.”<sup>13</sup>



Despite the break in official relations between Ethiopia and Israel, trade relations remained intact. As the Figure 3-1 shows, trade between the two countries increased steadily until 1978 when Mengistu ceased all military ties.

## THE MENGISTU REGIME

Soon after breaking ties with Israel, Haile Selassie came under attack in what would become a “creeping coup.” A committee of low ranking officers took over the government. Eventually, Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Mengistu Haile Mariam asserting his dominance and became de facto ruler of Ethiopia. This

<sup>12</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem, 1966-1980).

section will examine Mengistu's rise to power and his subsequent relations with Israel.

### 1974 Revolution

In February 1974 a committee of soldiers laid siege to the government of Ethiopia. Their six-month 'creeping coup' ending with the deposition of the Emperor on 12 September 1974. Colin Legum and Bill Lee point out that "only with this final stroke can the largely accidental coup be said to have become a revolution. The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), the Derg, emerged after the Emperor's deposition."<sup>14</sup>

Many scholars have argued that the army would not have been successful if Israeli military advisors had not left in October 1973. Among the scholars who espouse this theory is Asher Naim, Israel's first ambassador to Ethiopia after the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1989. Naim argues that the Ethiopian army admired the Israelis that they worked with and that the Israeli presence had become a strong moral force within the Ethiopian Army. He goes on to say "had Israel been there, maybe the revolution would never have happened."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, according to General Matityahu Peled, a former member of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) general staff, "the efficient Israeli advisers to the secret police in Addis Ababa saved Haile Selassie" from three previous coup attempts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>14</sup> Legum and Lee, Conflict in the Horn, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Asher Naim, Jerusalem, Israel, 12 January 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection, p. 52.

Whether or not the Israeli presence would have prevented the rise of the Derg is a question that is not likely to be answered. But the fact remains that the departure of Israeli officers following the rupture of relations contributed significantly to the vulnerability of the Haile Selassie's regime.<sup>17</sup>

During the first few years of the Derg there were rivalries and intrigues for power within the Derg.<sup>18</sup> This created an absence of a clear and identifiable leader until 1978 when Mengistu, who by sheer force of personality, reforming zeal and rhetorical ability, emerged victorious.<sup>19</sup> Indeed,



**Figure 3-2: Scheming Mengistu**

Mengistu was often to be found at the center of these deadly rivalries. It is suspected that in three separate cases he engineered the removal of the Ethiopian Head of State: Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974; General Aman Andom November 1974; and General Tafari Banti in February 1977.<sup>20</sup>

### Military Ties

Relations between Ethiopia and her Arab neighbors deteriorated after the killing of General Andom, an Eritrean with close ties to Sudan, in November 1974. The death of General Andom precipitated large scale fighting between the Eritrean insurgents and the Ethiopian forces. Without General Andom's presence as a mitigating force in the Derg, Egypt, Sudan, and many other Arab

<sup>17</sup> Guide, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Olusola Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy since the 1974 Revolution," Horn of Africa 3 (1980/81): 3-12.

States to began to openly lend support to the Eritreans.<sup>21</sup> Once again, Ethiopia was faced with hostile Arab neighbors.

The escalation of the Eritrean conflict, and the increasingly hostile action of Arab neighbors, led the Derg to seek Israeli military assistance. At the same time Israel had grown increasingly worried about the possibility of the collapse of Ethiopia and the emergence of an 'Arab Eritrea.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, as Joel Peters points out in his book Israel and Africa, "Though there was no discussion concerning the resumption of diplomatic ties, Israel responded positively to the Derg's request for arms and training. Israel immediately sent a group of officers to retrain units of the Ethiopian army."<sup>23</sup>

The Israeli reasoning for coming to the aid of the Derg was expressed by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Dayan, in his book describing his involvement in the negotiations for the Camp David Accords. In his text Dayan describes a meeting between himself and King Hassan of Morocco in September 1977.

The King asked me at one point whether Israel was involved in the war then going on in Ethiopia, and if so why? I told him that we were not involved in the war but only in aid to Ethiopia, towards whom we had moral obligations. Ethiopia had helped us in the past with port and air facilities when our ships and planes were in desperate straits. We would not refuse them now when they were in trouble and asked for arms.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Legum and Lee, Conflict in the Horn, pp. 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy."

<sup>22</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel".

<sup>23</sup> Peters, Israel and Africa, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> Moshe Dayan, Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 52.

Though Israeli military assistance was a mere fraction of what it had been prior to the break in relations, it served to significantly improve the Ethiopian military, which had been hollowed out by the conflict with the Eritreans. Israeli



**Figure 3-3: T-55 Tank**

forces trained Ethiopia's Fifth, or Nebelbal (Flame), Division, which subsequently formed the core of the forces that helped lift Mengistu to absolute power.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Israelis

engaged in training counterinsurgency and antiguerrilla techniques to help the Ethiopian army fight the Eritrean insurgency. Israel also supplied Ethiopia with military arms and spare parts.<sup>26</sup> Weapons supplied include Soviet-made T-54 and T-55 tanks that had been captured during the Yom Kippur War and spare parts for U.S.-made F-5 fighter planes.<sup>27</sup>

While the ruling Derg espoused socialism and had embraced the Palestinian cause, they were still willing to accept military assistance from Israel during the war with Somalia in 1977-78.<sup>28</sup> According to Shehim "Israeli supplied air-to-air missiles, napalm, and cluster bombs; helped the Ethiopians manage radar installations; and supplied spare parts for tanks and planes Ethiopia earlier had acquired from the United States."<sup>29</sup> Ethiopia, however, hoped to keep Israeli

<sup>25</sup> Shehim, "Israel-Ethiopian Relations."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Peters, *Israel and Africa*, p. 71

<sup>28</sup> The government of Ethiopia had allowed the Palestinians to open a political office in Addis Ababa. Arye Oded, *Africa, the PLO and Israel*, The Leonard Davis Institute Policy Studies, no. 37 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1990), p.24.

<sup>29</sup> Shehim, "Israel-Ethiopian Relations."

assistance low-key and out of the public eye. These efforts were to no avail as the story still made it into the press.

By February 1977 French newspapers carried reports to the effect that Israel had air bases on two Ethiopian-owned islands in the Bab el Mandeb straits. These bases helped the Israelis to protect their southern oil and cargo links via Eilat. In July the Los Angeles Times reported that Israel's advisors were fighting alongside Ethiopian troops in the battle for the Ogaden. In August Foreign Report revealed extensive military cooperation between the two countries. Israeli instructors were said to have formed and trained the new Seventh Division of the Ethiopian Army, which had been fighting since the beginning of July in Eritrea. Israeli pilots were also said to be flying the Ethiopian strike force in the northern province.<sup>30</sup>

While the veracity of these reports is questionable, the public was nonetheless aware of an Israeli military presence in Ethiopia.

In 1977 inter-Derg rivalries led to the death of General Tafari Banti. Banti, though an avowed socialist, had been in favor of maintaining close relations with the United States and seeking a peaceful solution to the Eritrean insurgency. According to Ojo, "Mengistu and others that emerged victorious after the 1977 'purge' were decidedly pro-Moscow. This change from moderate to radical leadership had serious implications for the country's relations with its neighbors and the super-powers."<sup>31</sup>

Shortly thereafter, in April 1977, Mengistu ended the 'special relationship' that had existed between the U.S. and Ethiopia since 1953.<sup>32</sup> Mengistu "ordered

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<sup>30</sup> Ojo, Africa and Israel, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> Ojo, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy".

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

the expulsion of 341 American military and civilian personnel from Ethiopia."<sup>33</sup> The end of U.S. military assistance created a hole in the Ethiopian military. Mengistu sought increased arms shipments from Israel (which was already supplying spare parts for U.S.-made equipment). Mengistu also turned to the Soviet Union for military assistance.<sup>34</sup>

The military ties remained an official secret until 1978 when the Israeli war hero Moshe Dayan, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that Israel was providing military equipment to Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup> However, "a complete cut-off of relations occurred only after the Soviet Union effectively supplanted the United States as the protector and supplier of needed weapons to the new Marxist state of Ethiopia."<sup>36</sup>

In 1979 Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David Accords, formally bringing peace between the two countries. Israeli peace with Egypt greatly reduced the strategic importance of Ethiopia. Additionally, Ben Gurion's periphery strategy had fallen to the wayside. Having been expelled from Ethiopia in 1974 and 1978, and with the fall of the Shah in 1979, Israel was left with only Turkey as a non-Islamic diplomatic ally in the region.

While the importance of Ethiopia to Israel was reduced on the regional scale, it remained important because of its long Red Sea coastline. "Should the shore approaches to the Bab el-Mandab ever come under the control of a nation or nations hostile to Israel, a major avenue of contact would be severely

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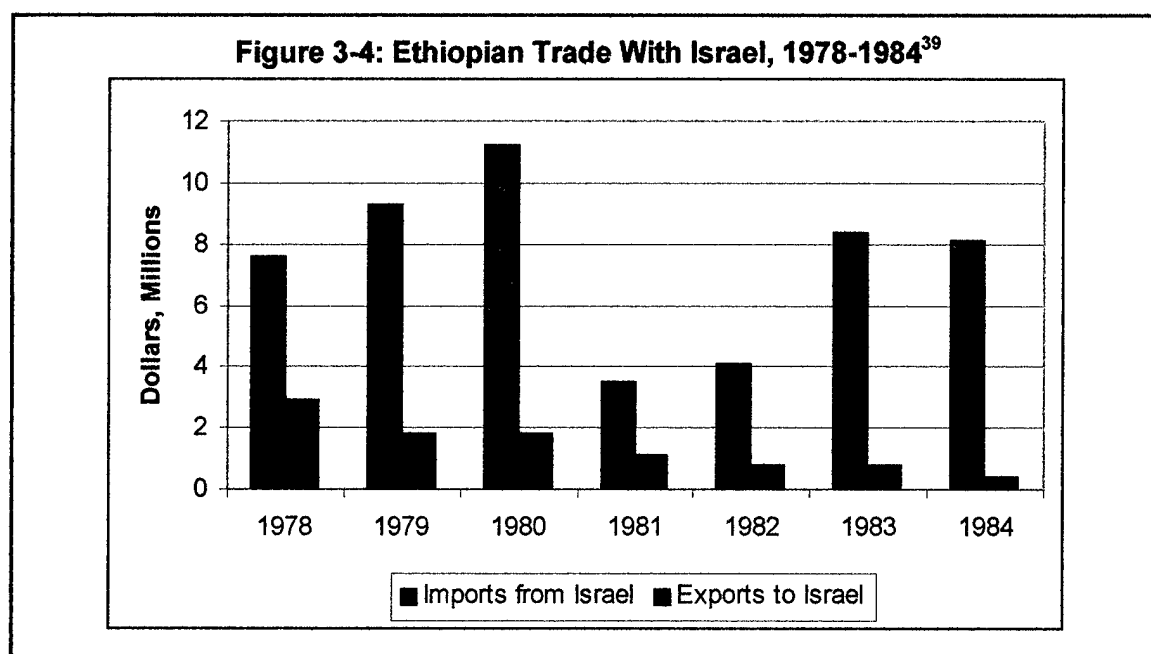
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> "The Flight of the Ethiopian Jews," Africa Now 45 (January 1985): 10-13.

<sup>36</sup> Agyeman-Duah, The United States, p. 106.

restricted, and for that reason Israel did not want Eritrea to secede from Ethiopia.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, while military ties were severed in 1978, economic relations continued, although greatly reduced. Additionally, the two nations were careful to maintain at least minimal communications.<sup>38</sup>



## ETHIOPIAN JEWS

While the geopolitical importance of Ethiopia was diminished following the Camp David Accords, a new issue was gaining prominence. The status of the Ethiopian Jews (also known as Beta Yisrael) had been kept off the foreign policy agenda during the reign of Haile Selassie. Erlich argues that “in the service of its strategic interests, the Israeli government shelved the Falasha issue.... The Israel

<sup>37</sup> Shehim, “Israel-Ethiopian Relations.”

<sup>38</sup> Guide, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem, 1980-1985).

of the 1960s was ready to ignore part of her own ethos in order not to embarrass the Emperor, and not to endanger the delicate Ethiopian connection.”<sup>40</sup> However, in 1977, Menachim Begin was elected Prime Minister of Israel and he began discussions of the status of Beta Yisrael.<sup>41</sup> This section will examine how the topic of the Ethiopian Jews shaped Ethiopian relations with Israel in the late 1970s and 1980s.

### Mengistu's Bargaining Chip

In 1975 the chief rabbinate ruled that Beta Yisrael were Jews, members of the lost tribe of Dan.<sup>42</sup> Soon thereafter, Ethiopian Jews were granted the right to aliyah, the Law of Return.<sup>43</sup> However, the Mengistu government was loath to let the Ethiopian Jews immigrate to Israel. In 1977 there were just 200 Ethiopian Jews in Israel.<sup>44</sup>

Prime Minister Begin pressed the issue and, while the details of the agreement have remained secret, it is suspected that Ethiopia agreed to allow some Ethiopian Jews to immigrate in exchange for Israeli-supplied weapons.<sup>45</sup> “At least one planeload flew from Addis Ababa to Tel Aviv. But a promising airlift was brought to an abrupt halt in February 1978” following Foreign Minister Dayan's revelations about Israeli military ties to Ethiopia.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Erlich, “Ethiopia and Israel.”

<sup>41</sup> Erlich, Ethiopia and the Middle East, p. 185.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Alexander, “Operation Moses,” Commentary 80 (July 1985): 45-49.

<sup>43</sup> “The Flight of the Ethiopian Jews.”

<sup>44</sup> Alexander, “Operation Moses.”

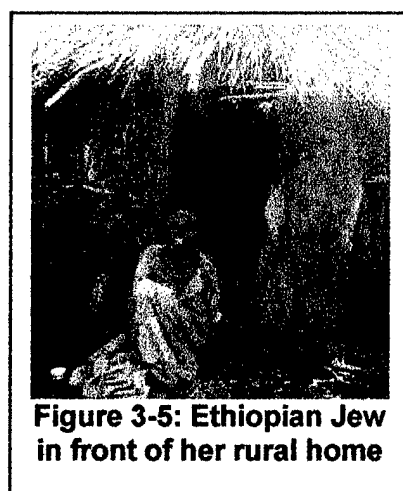
<sup>45</sup> Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection, p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> “The Flight of the Ethiopian Jews.”

Mengistu had used Israeli concern for the welfare of Ethiopian Jews to gain concessions and military assistance from Israel. This trend would continue into the 1980s. However, in the early 1980s, Mengistu was secure in his military alliance with the Soviet Union. With little need for Israeli arms, Mengistu was increasingly unwilling to bargain.

### Airlift Operations

The election of Begin in 1977 brought the issue of the Ethiopian Jews to the forefront of foreign policy issues with Ethiopia. While the people of Israel were also concerned by issues such as the war in Eritrea and the famine that was ravaging the Horn of Africa, decision-makers in Jerusalem were occupied only with the well being of Beta Yisrael.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 3-5: Ethiopian Jew in front of her rural home**

Marmount argues that "while non-Israeli Jewish elements do not control decisions taken by the Israeli Government in defense of national interests, a Diaspora community's mere existence creates a psychological impact upon an all encompassing Jewish solidarity within international relations."<sup>48</sup>

The situation for the Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia was not intrinsically bad. They are a rural people. They had been treated as second class citizens throughout much of Ethiopia's history. Ethiopian Jews "were traditionally

<sup>47</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Jacques Marmont, "Israel and the Socio-Economic Status of South Africa's Jewish Community," Journal of Modern African Studies 27, 1 (1989): 143-152.

trusted by their Christian neighbors, not allowed to own land and therefore, forced to work as potters, weavers, and blacksmiths – all despised craft.”<sup>49</sup> However, there was no overt persecution. Nor were the Ethiopian Jews the targets of genocidal attacks. Thus, prior to the 1980s, there was no pressing need for their ‘rescue’. From 1975 until 1984 only 3,000 Ethiopian Jews emigrated to Israel.<sup>50</sup>

But the situation of the early 1980s was different. There were several reasons behind the mass exodus of Beta Yisrael. The Horn of Africa, Ethiopia included, was in the midst of a famine of massive proportions that was being exacerbated by drought. Additionally, civil war had engulfed Ethiopia, threatening the villages of the Ethiopian Jews. Another important development was the Ethiopian Jews acknowledging that Israel represented a new, viable home.

As the situation in the Horn of Africa deteriorated, the push to ‘rescue’ Beta Yisrael intensified. The negotiations behind Operation MOSES were secret, involving Sudan, Egypt, Israel, United States, and, at the very least, the consent of the Ethiopian government. “It is clear that there were no direct contacts between Sudan and Israel for the airlift; and either Egypt or the U.S. served as an intermediary.”<sup>51</sup> Egypt’s involvement or at least acquiescence is implied by the fact that the aircraft carrying the Ethiopian Jews flew over Egyptian territory enroute to Europe.<sup>52</sup>

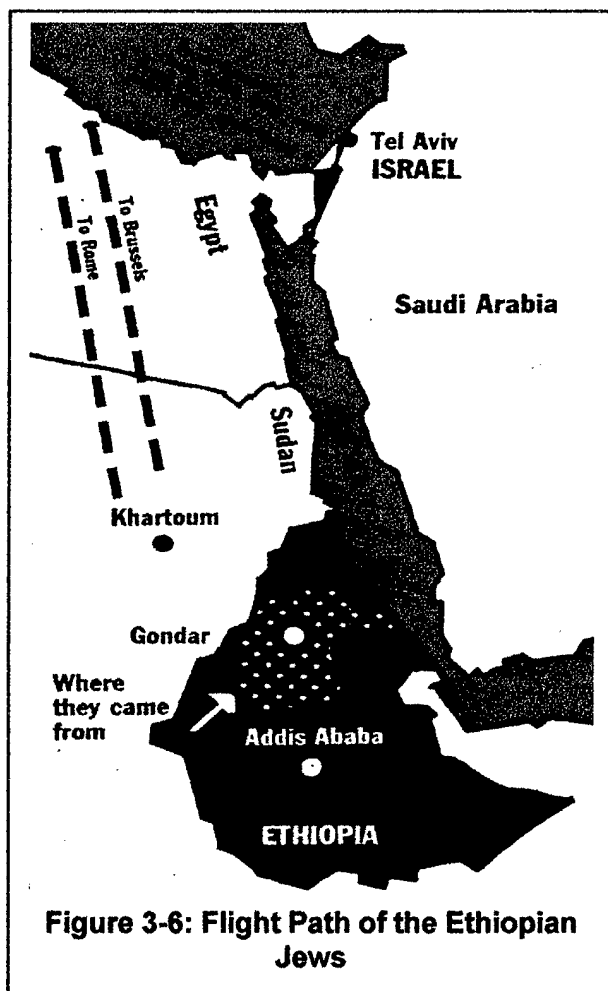
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<sup>49</sup> “The Flight of the Ethiopian Jews.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



access to the refugee camps.<sup>53</sup>

From November 1984 to January 1985 over 7,000 Ethiopian Jews were flown to Israel. Unfortunately, the abrupt end to the airlift left at least 4,000 Ethiopian Jews stranded in Sudanese refugee camps.<sup>54</sup> An estimated 20,000 Ethiopian Jews remained in Ethiopia.<sup>55</sup>

With the large community of Ethiopian Jews still in Ethiopia and the 4,000 known to be stranded in the Sudanese refugee camp, the safety and welfare of

By November 1984, thousands of Ethiopian Jews had walked to refugee camps in Sudan. After waiting for several months, they were airlifted by chartered aircraft to Europe and then eventually to Israel. The airlift operation began in earnest on 21 November 1984. However, the secret operation was leaked to the press and came to an abrupt halt on 6 January 1985. Ethiopia and Sudan denied all knowledge of the operation and blocked further

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Paul B. Henze, Ethiopia: The Fall of the Derg and the Beginning of recovery under the EPRDF (March 1990 – March 1992), (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), p. 21.

Beta Yisrael remained an important issue in Israeli foreign policy. The journal Africa Now quoted Prime Minister Shimon Peres, immediately after the collapse of the airlift, as saying, "I can say clearly that we shall not rest until all our brothers and sisters from Ethiopia will come safely back home. It is their salvation and nobody has to pay a price from our own people."<sup>56</sup> Consequently, unofficial bilateral relations remained between Ethiopia and Israel. As the current Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa, Avraham Toledo, put it, the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel in the 1980s was not so much one of cooperation as one of appeasement.<sup>57</sup> Israel worked to avoid antagonizing Mengistu for fear of the safety of the Ethiopian Jews.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the limited official relationship, economic ties remained. Trade relations, which had never completely ceased, were growing sporadically.<sup>59</sup> Exports from Ethiopia were negligible because of the declining domestic situation. Imports other than aid were also limited. Nevertheless, there was a gradual improvement in the trade between Ethiopia and Israel. (See Figure 3-7)

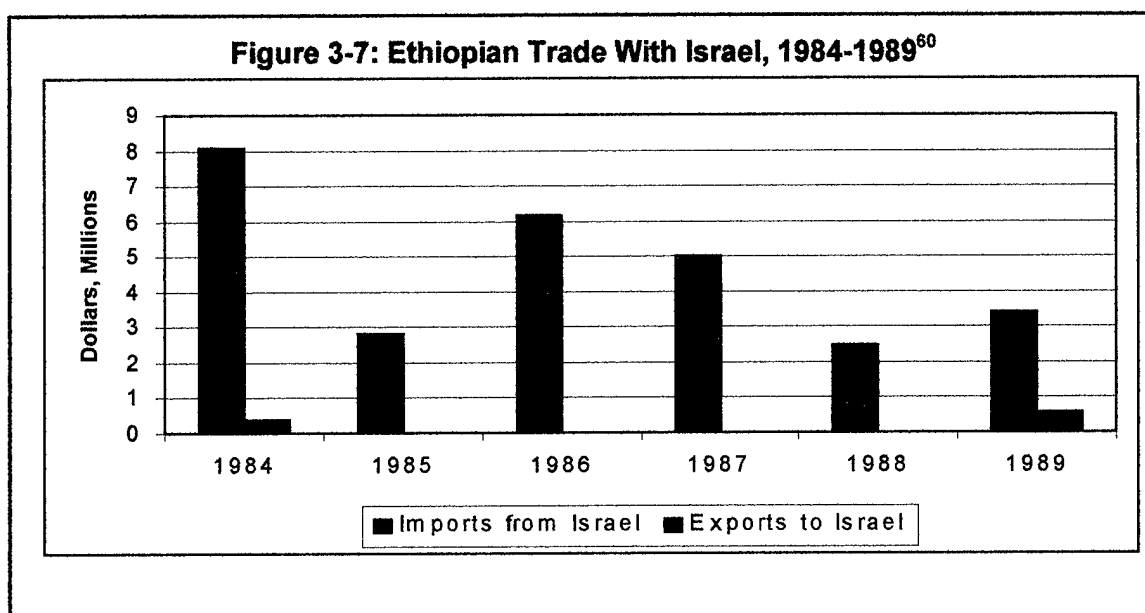
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<sup>56</sup> "The Flight of the Ethiopian Jews."

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori, Jerusalem, Israel, 10 January 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Guide, p. 9.



## CONCLUSION

The 1970s and 1980s were trying times for the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Dramatic changes both internally and externally had changed the national interests of each nation. These national interests, however, still involved each other. Mengistu was in need of military assistance, and it really did not matter who it was from. Israel was concerned about the welfare of a Diaspora community and continued free navigation of the Red Sea. Regardless of the issues at stake, both Ethiopia and Israel remained pragmatic in their foreign relations with each other.

<sup>60</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem, 1985-1990).

**CHAPTER 4**  
**ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL,**  
**1989-1998**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Following Operation MOSES, which ended in 1985, ties between Ethiopia and Israel were strained. Ethiopia was reliant on the Soviet Union for military assistance and did little to strengthen relations with other nations. However, in the late 1980s, Mengistu's situation became desperate as the Soviet Union sought to extricate itself from the faltering Mengistu regime. The loss of Soviet support led Mengistu to return to Israel for assistance. Once again the reality of the situation in Ethiopia led to a pragmatic foreign policy. Mengistu renewed formal relations with Israel and, when the insurgency succeeded in overthrowing Mengistu, they maintained these relations. This chapter will look at how the relations with Ethiopia changed through the final years of the Mengistu regime, to include Operation SOLOMON in 1991; how relations between Ethiopia and Israel were renewed after the fall of Mengistu; and how normalized relations have renewed the technical assistance and economic cooperation programs.

## **ETHIOPIA RENEWS TIES WITH ISRAEL**

The final years of the Mengistu regime were marked by turbulence, both in Ethiopia and in the rest of the world. Gorbachev was opening the Soviet Union to new ideas, the Warsaw Pact was crumbling, and in August 1990, the world's attention was focused on a small Arab country that had been invaded by Iraq. Meanwhile, Mengistu's hold on Ethiopia was disintegrating and his Soviet

benefactors were less willing to offer military assistance. Israel, for its part, was increasingly concerned about the status of the Ethiopian Jews. This section will explore the reasons behind the renewal of formal relations between Ethiopia and Israel, the status of the Ethiopian Jews during this time, and Operation SOLOMON, the massive airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

### Reasons Behind the Renewal

By 1989, Ethiopia was forced to seek a new supplier for military assistance. The Soviet Union, which had been the sole supplier for Ethiopia, was undergoing political changes and was no longer able to rescue Mengistu from the onslaught of the Tigrayan and Eritrean insurgents. The Mengistu regime had received over \$5 billion worth of weapons from the Soviet Union from 1974 until 1989.<sup>1</sup> However, starting in 1987 the assistance slowed to a trickle.<sup>2</sup>

It was in 1987 that the Soviets began to distance themselves from Mengistu. By April 1990, the military assistance had stopped completely. Gorbachev, withdrawing the last of his military advisers, "even refused to allow Soviet cargo planes in Addis Ababa to be used to resupply Asmara which had been cut-off by the separatist groups."<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, as the Soviet Union was leaving Ethiopia to its own, Mengistu was seeking to renew ties with Israel. In 1988 Mengistu approached Israel for assistance. Israel was eager to renew diplomatic ties with Ethiopia in

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<sup>1</sup> David Makowsky, "Mengistu aide begins talks here today as relations are renewed," The Jerusalem Post, 06 November 89, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> USACDA, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1991-1992, Washington, D.C.: USACDA, 1994.

hopes of securing the immigration of Ethiopian Jews and to encourage other African countries to renew diplomatic relations.<sup>4</sup> (See Table 4-1 for other African nations which had resumed diplomatic relations with Israel as of 1989.)<sup>5</sup> However, Mengistu insisted on keeping the relations secret, at least initially.

**Table 4-1: Resumption of Diplomatic Relations**

Zaire	14-May-82
Liberia	13-Aug-83
Cote d'Ivoire	12-Feb-86
Cameroon	26-Aug-86
Togo	16-Jun-87
Kenya	23-Dec-88
Central African Republic	16-Jan-89
Ethiopia	3-Nov-89

Israel enthusiastically began to rebuild ties, including technical assistance programs. According to Peters, "in 1988, thirty-three Ethiopian trainees had participated on a variety of courses in Israel and, at the end of the year, the Ethiopian Minister of Agriculture had paid a secret visit to Jerusalem to discuss the expansion of Israeli assistance to his country."<sup>6</sup> While Mengistu had hoped for assistance on par with the projects of the 1960s, technical assistance on that scale was no longer possible from the Israeli standpoint.

Israel was less enthusiastic about renewing military relations with Ethiopia. Mengistu "presumably believed that Israel would get involved directly in his wars, or at least rebuild his demoralized forces."<sup>7</sup> However, Israel would not even consider getting directly involved. Asher Naim, Israel's Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1990 to 1991, used an interesting analogy to describe Israel's assistance to Mengistu at this time. Ambassador Naim described Ethiopia as a lion, hungry for meat. But Israel did not want to give the lion meat. Instead they offered

<sup>3</sup> Agyeman-Duah, The United States, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> Makowsky, "Mengistu aide."

<sup>5</sup> Peters, Israel and Africa, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

cabbage. It was not what the Lion wanted but it was at least something to keep him occupied.<sup>8</sup>

Ambassador Naim went on to explain that there were two main reasons that Israel was unwilling to help Mengistu to the extent that he sought. First and foremost was that Mengistu had failed to recognize the changes in the geopolitical realities of the region. Israel had learned to be friends with at least some of her neighbors, greatly diminishing the strategic importance of an Ethiopian ally. Second, Israel did not agree with Mengistu's policies and recognized that Mengistu's regime was coming to an end. Israel did not want to arm Mengistu to enable him to stay in power by brute force.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the reluctance of the Israelis, the move to reestablish formal diplomatic relations went forward. In June 1989 the Mengistu regime announced the renewal of ties. On 3 November 1989, the 16-year break in official relations ended.<sup>10</sup> Israel opened an embassy in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia began plans to open an embassy in Tel Aviv.<sup>11</sup>

Later that week, at a press conference, the Foreign Minister for the Mengistu regime, Kessa Kebede, offered one reason for the renewal of ties. He said that his country's decision was based on the possibilities presented by Israel's "strong and close connections with the 'Jewish lobby' in the US."<sup>12</sup> Thus,

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<sup>7</sup> Haggai Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Asher Naim, Jerusalem, Israel, 12 January 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> African Economic Digest 10 (20 Nov 89): 3

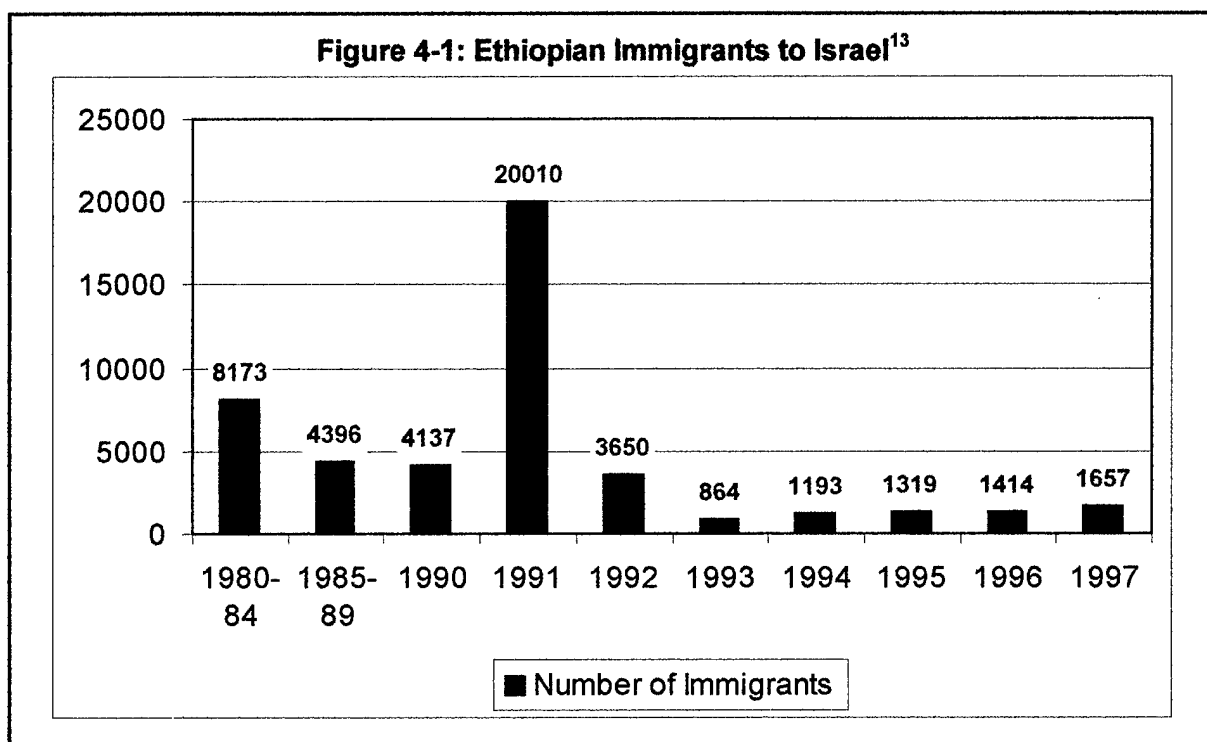
<sup>11</sup> Paul B. Henze, Ethiopia, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Hunter, "Israel and Ethiopia: Ties Restored," Middle East International (01 December 1989): 15.

by establishing ties with Israel, Ethiopia was hoping to regain the support of the United States.

### Ethiopian Jews

While Ethiopia renewed relations in search of a new ally and military support, Israel's reasoning was altogether different. Mengistu was virtually blackmailing Israel into supporting Ethiopia, using the safety of the Ethiopian Jews as bait.<sup>14</sup> The safety of the Ethiopian Jews had become paramount in Israeli policy with Ethiopia. According to Jane Hunter, "the Mengistu government's agreement to permit them to go to Israel has been repeatedly



<sup>13</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem, 1990-1998).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

characterized as a quid pro quo for Israel's military aid."<sup>15</sup>

In early 1990, Mengistu permitted some Falashas to emigrate to Israel, but procedures were cumbersome and the impression was soon widespread among all interested parties that he was holding back to get Israel to speed up arms deliveries. In July 1990, the government cancelled exit permits that had been granted to Ethiopian Jews. At the same time the Ethiopian government increased its request for military assistance from Israel.<sup>16</sup>

But Israel was reticent to provide weapons to Mengistu to secure the safety of the Ethiopian Jews. However, it is evident that out of fear for the Ethiopian Jews, "the dictator was furnished with some token help and samples of available bombs."<sup>17</sup>

It is, however, difficult to gauge the extent of this military assistance. Some scholars point to the sheer volume of reports as proof of the existence of an extensive arms deal.<sup>18</sup> There were varying reports of Israeli-supplied weaponry such as cluster bombs, Israeli advisers, and even Israeli units fighting for the Ethiopian Army.<sup>19</sup>

Ambassador Naim, however, denies the existence of any extensive program. Instead, he points out that his research at the time of these reports led to three distinct sources for these reports, each with its own reasons. The first source uncovered was the Ethiopian army information service. The morale of the

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Hunter, "Cluster Bombs and Falashas," Middle East International (02 February 1990): 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld, Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia and Eritrea, 2d ed. (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1994), p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>18</sup> Henze, Ethiopia, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Ethiopian army was very low and it was thought that the presence of Israeli advisors would boost the morale, inciting the troops to rejoin the fight. The second source was from the armed opposition to the Ethiopian government. The rebels were spreading this information on their radio programs. The goal of the rebels was for the Arabs to hear that the Israelis were helping the Ethiopians so that they, in turn, would arm the rebels against the Israeli aggressors. The third group was the Arabs themselves. They wanted to smear Israel's reputation among African nations, by spreading reports of Jewish arms killing other Africans.<sup>20</sup>

### Operation SOLOMON

Regardless of the extent or even existence of an Israeli arms deal with the Mengistu regime, "Mengistu was still negotiating on arms-for-the-Falashas issue" as the rebel forces moved closed to Addis Ababa.<sup>21</sup> However, Mengistu was increasingly in less of a position to bargain from.

In 1990 Israel became increasingly worried that the lack of authority and vacillation that characterized the Mengistu regime jeopardized the emigration of Ethiopian Jews.<sup>22</sup> By the end of that year at least 20,000 Ethiopian Jews had gathered in an improvised camp on the outskirts of Addis Ababa and hundreds

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

<sup>21</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

<sup>22</sup> Wagaw, Teshom G. "The International Political Ramifications of Falasha Emigration," Journal of Modern African Studies 29 (1991): 557-581.

more were coming in weekly.<sup>23</sup> Mengistu was allowing some of these to emigrate to Israel, but the flow was interrupted at the whim of the dictator.<sup>24</sup>

As the Derg regime deteriorated during the first months of 1991, fears mounted that Mengistu would attack the Ethiopian Jews or "incite mobs to attack and disperse them."<sup>25</sup> Thus, in April 1991, negotiations for the release of the Ethiopian Jews began with U.S. and Israeli officials working together. Mengistu agreed not to harm the Ethiopian Jews, while the leaders of the Ethiopia's Popular Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the rebel movement moving in on Addis Ababa, agreed to a "mass airlift to Israel and to permit free movement of Falashas out of northern regions" under their control.<sup>26</sup>

Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union had been urging Mengistu to step down for weeks, he refused. Thus, it was quite surprising for all involved when he fled to Zimbabwe on 21 May 91, just a few days before the scheduled conclusion of the negotiations on the emigration of the Ethiopian Jews.<sup>27</sup>

The sudden departure of the dictator accelerated the negotiations. On 24 May 1991 Ambassador Naim got word from Kessa Kebede that the airlift of the Ethiopian Jews could begin. Naim recollected: "the Israeli Air Force was just waiting for the word. The whole thing started at 6 o'clock in the morning. And we finished by Saturday, 11 o'clock. It was really amazing how quickly the whole thing went."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Henze, *Ethiopia*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

<sup>25</sup> Henze, *Ethiopia*, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Wagaw, "The International Political Ramifications."

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

The U.S. and Israel worked together to airlift out all “but those whom Israel refused to recognize as Jews.”<sup>29</sup>

Kebede, Mengistu’s Foreign Minister and a key player in the negotiations for the airlift operation, “was carried on a stretcher disguised as a desperately ill Beta Yisrael woman on the last flight to leave the capital.”<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 4-2: PM Shamir with Ethiopian Jews newly arrived in Israel**

Kebede was taken to Israel where he received asylum.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir had this to say about what became known as Operation SOLOMON:

Since yesterday morning (Friday), an airlift from Addis Ababa to Israel was set in motion. The airlift brought about 15,000 immigrants in about 40 direct flights. The operation was undertaken with the approval of the Ethiopian authorities and with their active assistance. Among other things, planes belonging to the Ethiopian national airline transported some of the immigrants. The IDF (Israeli Defense Force) was charged with coordinating the airlift. Planes belonging to El Al were also used.<sup>31</sup>

On 25 May 1991 Operation SOLOMON was completed. In just over 24 hours, 14,420 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel.<sup>32</sup> Three days later the EPRDF forces would take over Addis Ababa.

<sup>29</sup> Henze, *Ethiopia*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister Shamir’s statement on 25 May 1991, as quoted in *Israel’s Foreign Relations: Selected Documents 1988-1992, Volume Twelve*, ed. Meron Medzini (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), pg. 524.

<sup>32</sup> *Israel’s Foreign Relations: Selected Documents 1988-1992, Volume Eleven*, ed. Meron Medzini (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), p. xxii.

## ETHIOPIA'S NEW GOVERNMENT

### Diplomatic Ties

As the EPRDF forces approached the capital city, and most diplomats vacated the city, the Israeli ambassador stayed behind. Naim felt that, without



**Figure 4-3: EPRDF Forces Take Control of Addis Ababa**

Mengistu in the city, government troops would put up little or no fight. He was right. Soon after the EPRDF took control of the city, Naim met with some members of the leadership of the EPRDF and quickly

established relations with the new government.<sup>33</sup>

When Meles Zenawi arrived in Addis Ababa on 1 June 1991, Ambassador Naim was the second foreign representative to meet with him. While the Israelis had, in the 1960s and 1970s, armed and trained the forces that opposed the insurgents, Zenawi remained eager to establish relations with a friendly country.<sup>34</sup> As the Transitional Government took control of the country, it was keenly aware of the precarious nature of its newfound freedom from dictatorship. Thus, Zenawi pragmatically sought as many allies as he could, including Israel.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Israel was also eager to establish relations with Ethiopia. Even with Operation SOLOMON thousands of Ethiopian Jews remained in the countryside. Additionally, Israel remained hopeful that the Ethiopian example would inspire other African nations to renew diplomatic ties with Israel. As for their previous ties to the Mengistu regime, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa said, "We don't choose the leader in the country, the people choose the leader of the



**Figure 4-4: MFA Peres, PM Rabin and PM Leyan sign cooperation agreement**

country. Our relations are with the people of the country."<sup>35</sup>

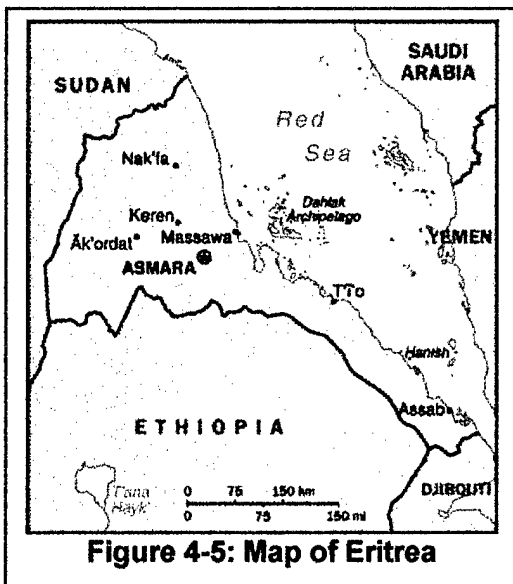
Throughout the 1990s the diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Israel continued to grow. The Ethiopian Prime Minister Leyan visited Israel in 1994. This state visit enhanced the cooperation between the two countries.<sup>36</sup>

### Eritrean Secession

One consequence of the fall of Mengistu and the rise of Meles Zenawi was the secession of Eritrea. Though the referendum on Eritrean secession was not until 1993, it was considered a foregone conclusion as early as 1991. This change resulted in Ethiopia becoming landlocked and the strategic Red Sea coast going to Eritrea. Thus, Ethiopian strategic importance on the Red Sea and

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori, Jerusalem, Israel, 10 January 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Sosina Ayalew, "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy: A Synopsis of the Foreign Policy of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) since the Adoption of the Charter in July 1991," *Ethioscope* 1 (September 1994): 3-10.



the Bab el Mandeb, was now of strategic importance to Eritrea and Israel was eager to establish diplomatic relations with the new country.

The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), which governed the newly independent country, seemed to have dual goals. The EPLF, under its charismatic leader Isaias Afwerki, sought to establish

close relations with Israel while simultaneously seeking economic assistance from the neighboring Arab states.<sup>37</sup> These dual goals, while indicative of Afwerki's independence, have resulted in some interesting diplomacy.

Just prior to independence, Eritrea stated that it was interested in a wide array of cooperation with Israel. Among the fields mentioned were agriculture, health, and education.<sup>38</sup> At the same time Eritrean officials made public pronouncements about normalizing Israeli relations with Eritrea and that these relations "pose no threat to Arab security."<sup>39</sup>

Despite this diplomatic intrigue, Israel was one of the first states to establish a consulate in Eritrea after liberation in 1991 and to formally recognize full independence immediately after the UN-supervised referendum in April

<sup>37</sup> David Styan, "Israel, Eritrea and Ethiopia: A Convolved Relationship," Middle East International (06 August 1993): 18-19.

<sup>38</sup> David Makowsky, "Diplomatic mission expected to open in independent Eritrea," The Jerusalem Post, 16 February 1993.

<sup>39</sup> "Eritrean aide sees U.S. "bias" towards Ethiopia," London Al-Zaman, 02 July 1998.

1993.<sup>40</sup> Since independence in 1993, Eritrea and Israel have maintained a close relationship. As Afwerki said, "Eritrea's relations with Israel are good. There has been a very clear policy towards Israel."<sup>41</sup> However, he went on to state in that same article that "Our political interests will determine how & when we choose our friends."<sup>42</sup> Thus, even with Eritrea, the relationship with Israel is determined by pragmatic decision-making based on national interests.

## **ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

### **Economic Relations**

The new government of Ethiopia has renewed its interest in Israeli economic cooperation and technical assistance. After thirty years of civil war, drought, and socialist economic programs the Ethiopian economy was in tatters. "Exports during EC 1982 (1989-1990) fell to \$375 million, less than half the countries severely curtailed import bill. Coffee earnings reached an all-time low during the same period of \$175 million."<sup>43</sup>

Trade between Israel and Ethiopia has grown steadily since the renewal of formal diplomatic ties in 1989.

Ethiopia's main exports to Israel are agricultural produce, particularly coffee, oil seeds, sesame seeds, lentils and cereals. Due to the large Ethiopian immigrant community in Israel, Ethiopia

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<sup>40</sup> Styan, "Israel, Eritrea and Ethiopia."

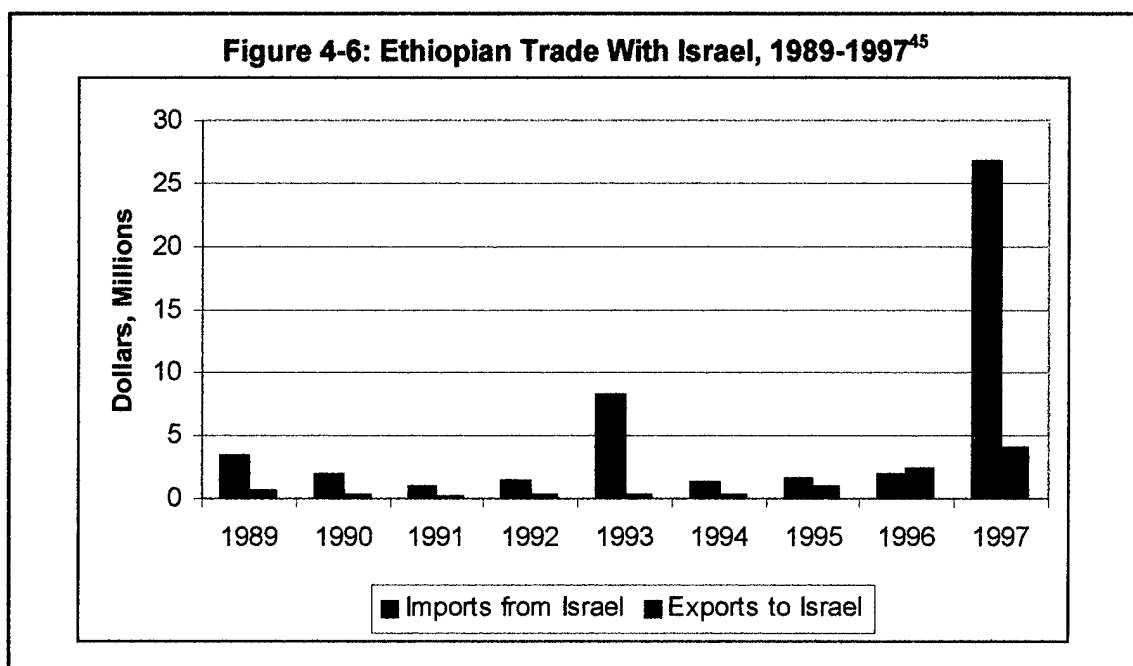
<sup>41</sup> Stephen Hubbel, "Eritrea: Towards an Uncertain Future," Middle East International 449 (30 April 93): 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Henze, Ethiopia, p. 6.

is now also exporting to Israel the popular *tef*, a sugar grain type substance that is ground into flour and baked. Ethiopian semi-processed leathers are sold in Israel, as well. Ethiopia imports from Israel medical supplies and equipment, computer, and software products.<sup>44</sup>

By 1998 Ethiopia had grown to become Israel's second trading partner in Africa with trade in the first nine months of 1998 increasing 135% over the same period in 1997.<sup>46</sup>



There are also numerous joint ventures with Israeli companies working in Ethiopia. For instance, Motorola Israel and Telad are working on telecommunication projects in Ethiopia.<sup>47</sup>

As Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa Avraham Toledo put it, in economic cooperation between Israel and Ethiopia, "the sky is the limit."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Trade Between Israel and Ethiopia Growing," Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce Newsletter 9 (January 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel (Jerusalem, 1990-1997).

<sup>46</sup> "Israel Ambassador Talks to the Addis Tribune," Addis Tribune, 06 November 1998.

<sup>47</sup> "Trade Between Israel and Ethiopia Growing."

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori.

Economic cooperation is based in the private sector with the only limiting factor being the initiative of Ethiopian and Israeli companies. The governments of both Ethiopia and Israel are actively encouraging private sector investment. Israel has even created a special section within the Chamber of Commerce for the encouragement of Israeli and African economic partnerships.<sup>49</sup>

### Technical Assistance

Technical assistance has also grown steadily between Ethiopia and Israel. Technical assistance with the new Ethiopian government started almost immediately. Israel had wired \$35 million, meant for the Mengistu regime, to an American bank. When Mengistu left Addis Ababa and sought refuge in Zimbabwe, he no longer had access to the money. Instead, the money went to the new government. Before giving it to the new government, Ambassador Naim explained to Zenawi that he could take the money and spend it and it would be gone very quickly. Or "you can leave this money and we will send our best experts, in agriculture, irrigation, horticulture, and help with a lot of improvements."<sup>50</sup> But the outgoing Mengistu had emptied the government coffers and the liquid capital was more important to the nascent government.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, Israeli technical assistance programs were soon flourishing in Ethiopia. Mashav, the Center for International Cooperation of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offers courses in Israel and sends experts to Ethiopia

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

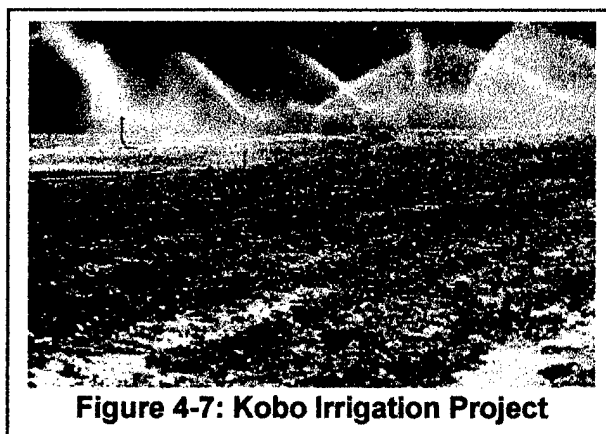
<sup>50</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

to teach classes in agriculture, health, or education, among other things. Each course is tailored to the realities of the situation, with the emphasis on training people to do for themselves. According to an article in the Addis Tribune, "Israel's cooperation programs, particularly in agricultural and medicine, all make a meaningful contribution to Ethiopia's development."<sup>52</sup>

The only limitation is the budget. Toledo points out that Israel has a very limited budget but is more than willing to provide the manpower for technical assistance programs that have been funded by third parties such as non-governmental organizations and other countries.<sup>53</sup>

One example of Israeli technical assistance is the Kobo irrigation project. This project is a coordinated effort between Mashav and USAID. As the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs website states, "the project endeavors



**Figure 4-7: Kobo Irrigation Project**

to focus on modern agricultural technologies, promote economic ventures as well as international cooperation. It reflects Israel's dedication to share with others advanced technologies, know-how, human resource enrichment and practical experience, gained in agricultural and rural development."<sup>54</sup>

The results of the first trial were encouraging, and gave the farmers an adequate income. The main crops were cereals (barley and sorghum), maize

<sup>52</sup> "Israel Ambassador Talks."

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori.

<sup>54</sup> "Kobo: MASHAV Project in Ethiopia," <http://www.israel.org/mfa/go.asp?MFAH020q0>.

and teff, vegetables (tomatoes, chillies, and onions), and the yields obtained were between 8 to 10 times larger than those produced by traditional methods.<sup>55</sup>

Eight families participate in the Kobo Project, which extends over an area of 7.5 hectares. Each family works about half a hectare, with the objective being to extend the cultivated area up to 10 hectares. The Kobo Project is supervised by an Israeli agricultural expert. The goal is to reach a level of sustainability, and then to hand it over to a local manager...Influence of the project on the close environs is greatly felt, due to the high yields obtained. These results are directly linked to the use of appropriate agro-technology. The results were so impressive, that it was decided to allocate some 10,000 hectares - about one-fifth of the entire Valley - to advanced irrigation systems for the cultivation of cereals and vegetables and the planting of orchards. Only 10 years ago the area was so desolate that its inhabitants suffered from starvation, or were forced to abandon their property in despair.<sup>56</sup>

Projects such as this reveal the large benefits to be reaped from the sharing of knowledge. Israeli technical assistance projects with Ethiopia have continued to benefit those involved. Additionally, Israeli assistance benefits those not directly involved as they learn from Israeli trained Ethiopians.



**Figure 4-8: Kobo Project at the market**

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

## **CONCLUSION**

The turbulence of the late 1980s and early 1990s left in its wake a blossoming relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Throughout the turbulence, pragmatism remained the hallmark of the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Israel sought to appease Mengistu to ensure the safety of the Ethiopian Jews, while Mengistu was prepared to take assistance from any corner of the globe. The new governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea were eager to forge new alliances outside of Africa. And, despite having been aided by various Arab countries throughout the insurgency, the newly installed governments sought relations with Israel.

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**CHAPTER 5**

**CONCLUSION AND**

**PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the preceding chapters have shown, the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel has been marked by very dramatic changes since they first began in 1955. From the abrupt rupture in diplomatic relations during the Yom Kippur War to the high drama of Operation SOLOMON, the nature of the relationship has changed. What has remained constant is the pragmatic adherence to national interests as the driving forces behind foreign policy. This final chapter will highlight the more important motivating factors in the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Additionally, this chapter will offer some thoughts on the prospects for future relations.

## **RELATIONS, 1955-1972**

Early relations between Ethiopia and the modern state of Israel were amicable and based, at least initially, on a sense of shared heritage and common interests. Traditionally, links were based on the Ethiopian legacy of Solomon. The common interests of Ethiopia and Israel extended from the fact that both nations saw themselves as surrounded by hostile Islamic neighbors.<sup>1</sup>

Israel's first ambassador to Ghana, Ehud Avriel, wrote, "With joy one remembers how we in Israel threw ourselves, with verve and boundless enthusiasm, into cooperation with the fledgling movement of emerging African

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Jay Klinghofer, "Israel in Africa: The Strategy of Aid," Africa Report 17 (April 1972): 12-14.

nationalism.”<sup>2</sup> This same enthusiasm characterized the technical assistance and economic cooperation programs of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the motivation behind this enthusiasm can be attributed to Zionism and socialist idealism.

Zionism and socialist idealism can both be found in this excerpt from a speech made by Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to the Knesset, 28 June 1966.

Like Israel, the new States of Africa fall into the category of developing countries. Like them, Israel seeks ways and means always to bridge the gap between the developed and the developing societies. If one considers the basis of our cooperation more profoundly, the conviction grows that the African States and Israel are also bound together by memories of the servitude and suffering that were so long the portion of the African peoples and of Jewry. African and Jew are synonyms for oppression and slavery. No wonder that the Africans feel that color is no barrier between him and the Israeli. In the Israeli consciousness there is no room for racialism. Discrimination is utterly incompatible with Jewish ways of thought.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the case of Ethiopia, pragmatic acknowledgement of the geopolitical realities held greater sway in the foreign policy arena. From 1956 until 1965, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs was Golda Meir. In her book My Life, Meir explains one aspect of the situation in the Middle East which greatly influenced Israeli foreign policy with Ethiopia and Africa as a whole. Meir wrote: “at least some of the impetus for my initial involvement with Africa and with the Africans in the late 1950s came as an emotional response to the situation in

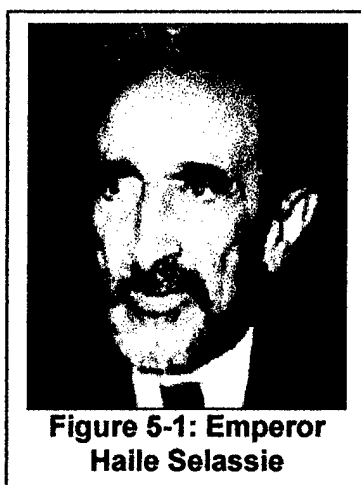
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<sup>2</sup> Avriel, “Israel’s Beginnings,” p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol address to the Knesset, 28 June 1966, as quoted in Israel’s Foreign Relations: Basic Documents 1948-1972, Provisional Draft, p. 873.

which we found ourselves after the Sinai Campaign – in many respects entirely alone, less than popular and certainly misunderstood.”<sup>4</sup>

Private sector trade contacts between Ethiopia and Israel began in the early 1950s. By 1956 the government of Emperor Haile Selassie had *de facto*



recognized the state of Israel and exchanged diplomatic representation (see Figure 5.1). These early relations were mostly in the economic field, including technical assistance. Haile Selassie began to deal with Israel directly in the late 1950s and more forcefully in the 1960s when security became more of an issue.

In the 1960s the situation in Ethiopia changed and the national interests of Ethiopia became more focused on border security. Somali irredentism and Eritrean insurgents threatened Ethiopia. Thus, Haile Selassie sought military assistance from Israel, in addition to the technical assistance and economic cooperation programs that were already in place.

The 1960s also saw the rise of Israel's periphery strategy. This strategy consisted of military alliances between Israel and non-Arab countries in the

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<sup>4</sup> Meir, My Life, p. 317.

Middle East. Specifically, Israel hoped to strengthen Ethiopia, Turkey, and Iran into powerful Middle East allies.

Israel was also concerned about freedom of travel in the Red Sea and through the Bab el Mandeb. Ethiopia, with its long Red Sea coastline and its position on the Horn of Africa, was a key country in preventing the Red Sea from becoming an Arab lake.

Thus, the military relationship grew stronger into the early 1970s. However, the Emperor was under increasing pressure from both the Organization of African Unity and her Islamic neighbors to cut ties with Israel. This pressure culminated in 1973.

## **RELATIONS, 1973-1989**

In 1973, amidst the Yom Kippur War, Ethiopia severed diplomatic relations with Israel along with most other African countries. According to The Jerusalem Post, "of all the countries of Black Africa that severed their diplomatic ties with the Jewish state in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, none can have pained Israelis by its actions as much as Ethiopia."<sup>5</sup> Despite the official break in relations, lines of communication were left open and economic cooperation continued. However, Israeli military advisors were withdrawn from Ethiopia.

A few months after the Yom Kippur War, an armed revolt overthrew the Ethiopian government. The Army revolutionaries deposed the Emperor in

September 1974. A year later, the ruling Derg turned to Israel for military assistance against the emboldened Eritrean insurgents.

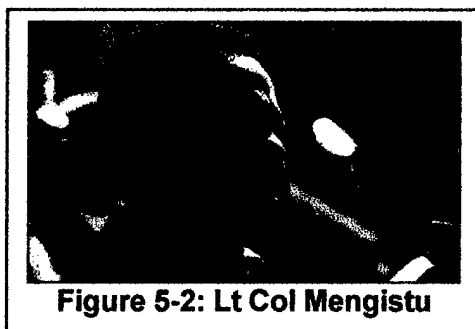
From 1975 until 1978 there was a tacit military relationship between Ethiopia and Israel. Israel was eager to help for two main reasons. First was the conception that the Eritrean insurgent group was mostly Muslim and was receiving military assistance from Arab nations such as Libya and Syria. Second was the rising concern for the welfare of the Ethiopian Jews.

The military relationship came to an abrupt halt when the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Dayan, disclosed what had been a secret military cooperation program. This announcement embarrassed the Derg, causing Ethiopia to categorically deny Israeli military assistance and to expel the Israeli military advisors in Ethiopia. The end of the military relationship with Israel did not, however, leave Ethiopia without an arms supplier. Mengistu forged new ties with the Soviet Union and secured military assistance from the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries throughout the rest of the 1970s and much of the 1980s.

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<sup>5</sup> "Ethiopia renews ties," The Jerusalem Post, 11 June 89.

While Ethiopia was forging a friendship with the Soviets, Israel was making peace with Egypt. The Camp David Accords greatly reduced Ethiopia's strategic importance in the eyes of the Israelis. However, because of the Ethiopian Jews, Israel maintained contact with the Mengistu regime throughout



the 1980s (see Figure 5.2). Lawrence P. Frank called this era of relations the era of *tachlis*, or unadorned realism.<sup>6</sup>

## RELATIONS, 1989-1998

By 1989 the Mengistu regime had lost nearly all external support. The Soviets had withdrawn their advisors while the rebel movements were steadily gaining ground against a demoralized Ethiopian Army. It was at this hour of need that Mengistu turned to his old ally Israel.

Israel was hesitant to offer military assistance. However, as Mengistu began to treat the Ethiopian Jews as a bargaining chip held hostage on the

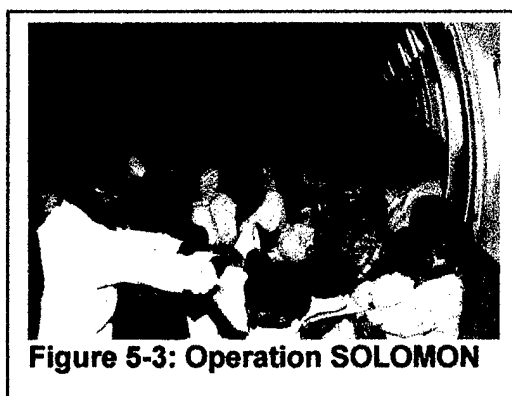
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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence P. Frank, "Israel and Africa: the Era of Tachlis," Journal of Modern African Studies 26, 1 (1988): 151-155. *Tachlis* is a Yiddish word that has been incorporated into Hebrew and is used to describe an extreme form of pragmatism.

outskirts of Addis Ababa, Israel was cornered into providing minimal military support. Even with this military assistance, Mengistu remained reluctant to allow the Ethiopian Jews to leave Ethiopia.

Mengistu's vacillation on the Ethiopian Jews' issue led to the negotiations for a massive airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Days after Mengistu fled the besieged capital, nearly 15,000 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in Operation SOLOMON (see Figure 5.3). This heroic effort, which took a little over twenty-four hours, was not the result of fear of anti-Semitism or a desperate situation in Ethiopia. As Ambassador Asher Naim put it, the "Jews wanted to get out of Ethiopia and Israel was ready to help."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the completion of Operation SOLOMON, Addis Ababa was taken over by the EPRDF and a transitional government formed. While peace talks with Syria and the Palestinians and peace with Jordan had continued to reduced Ethiopia's strategic importance, Israel was eager to establish ties with the new government.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Interview with Asher Naim, Jerusalem, Israel, 12 January 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Erlich, "Ethiopia and Israel."

Ethiopia and the newly independent Eritrea were also eager to establish relations with Israel. Diplomatic ties with other countries are a key measurement of the legitimacy of a new government. Therefore, the former insurgents did not concern themselves with Israel's past assistance to the Mengistu regime. The Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs for Africa explained it this way. "We do not choose the leader in the country, the people choose the leader of the country. Our relations are with the people of the country."<sup>9</sup>

The 1990s have seen a rebuilding of diplomatic and economic relations between Ethiopia and Israel. According to an article in the Addis Tribune, "Ethiopia and Israel continue a friendship which has always been mutually beneficial. A relationship based on history and tradition, starting with the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of King Solomon has now been supplemented by a growth in trade and development cooperation."<sup>10</sup>

While the technical assistance and economic cooperation programs are not equal to the scale seen in the 1950s and 1960s, they have helped Ethiopia recover from the devastation of the Mengistu era. Some scholars have argued that the 1990s were an era of mutual disillusionment. Some people on both sides of the Red Sea may have had high expectations of the rekindling of technical assistance programs of the 1960s. However, the vast majority of those involved understand that the times have changed and with them Israel's ability to provide extensive assistance.<sup>11</sup>

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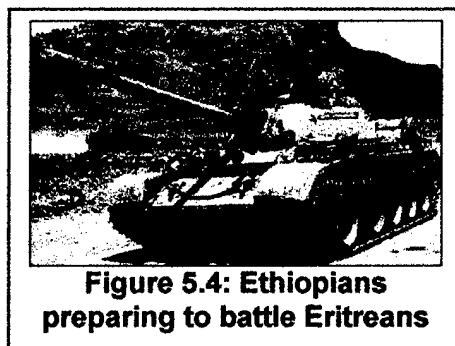
<sup>9</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori, Jerusalem, Israel, 10 January 2000.

<sup>10</sup> "Israel Ambassador Talks to the Addis Tribune", Addis Tribune, 06 November 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Asher Naim.

## PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

In May 1998 war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea, ostensibly over a parcel of land in northern Ethiopia (see Figure 5.4). These hostilities have put Israel, a friend to both nations, in a difficult position. Current Israeli policy is avoiding involvement in situations such as this. Thus military contracts with Ethiopia and Eritrea have been suspended until a peaceful solution is found to the dispute.



The turbulence has also served as a damper on the economic and technical assistance programs. However, some programs do continue, as does the active encouragement of private sector investment. Trade between Ethiopia and Israel is likely to continue its steady rise.

Diplomatically, Ethiopia has been a disappointing ally for Israel. In international fora such as the UN and the OAU, Ethiopian voting on Israeli issues has not been satisfactory from an Israeli point of view.<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia has pointed to the lack of progress in the Middle East Peace Process as the reason. Even the

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Avraham Toledo and Menashe Tzipori.

special bond forged from the historical affinity is insufficient to mitigate what is seen as a stalled peace process.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Israel and Ethiopia maintain a very close alliance that is likely to continue to grow in the years to come. Between 1994 and 1996, Israel restored diplomatic ties with 19 African countries, bringing the total to 42.<sup>14</sup> Ethiopia has been a gateway into the rest of Africa. As the peace process continues, Israeli relations with Ethiopia and the rest of Africa will continue to blossom.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Year in Review," Israeli Government Yearbook, Jerusalem, 1999.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS**

- 3 April 1930** - Haile Selassie Emperor of Ethiopia
- 3 October 1935** – Italian invasion of Ethiopia begins
- 2 May 1936** – Haile Selassie leaves Ethiopia for Jerusalem
- 3 June 1936** - Italian Army enters Addis Ababa
- 16 April 1938** – Britain recognizes the Italian conquest of Ethiopia
- 20 January 1941** - Haile Selassie enters Ethiopia with Wingate forces
- 5 May 1941** – Haile Selassie enters liberated Addis Ababa
- 17 November 1947** – UN vote favoring the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel; Ethiopia abstains
- 1950** – UN Resolution granting federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, thereby granting Ethiopia control of Eritrean Sea ports
- 15 September 1952** – Eritrea federated with Ethiopia
- 22 November 1955** – Ethiopia recognizes de facto the State of Israel
- 16 May 1956** – Opening of Israeli Consulate in Addis Ababa
- 1956** – Sinai Campaign reopens the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping
- 1958** – Israel establish Division of International Cooperation w/I the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 1 September 1961** – ELF fire first shots in 30-year War for Independence
- 24 October 1961** – Ethiopia extends full de jure recognition of Israel; Announcement of full diplomatic relations
- 1962** – Israeli Ambassador arrives in Ethiopia, Ethiopia establish consulate in Jerusalem
- 1962** – Eritrea 'reunited' with Ethiopia

**11 May 1963** – Establishment of the Organization of African States in Addis Ababa

**1963-64** – Border war between Ethiopia and Somalia

**5-10 June 1967** – Israel's Six Days War

**6 October 1973** – Egypt, Jordan and Syria attack Israel precipitating the Yom Kippur War

**16 October 1973** – Israeli forces cross Suez Canal, occupying "African" territory

**23 October 1973** – Ethiopia breaks diplomatic ties with Israel

**January 1974** – Outbreak of army mutiny

**February 1974** – Military revolution in Ethiopia

**12 September 1974** – Dethronement and house arrest of Haile Selassie

**1975** – Separdi Chief rabbi Ovadia Yosef ruled that Beta Yisrael were Jews, members of the lost tribe of Dan

**April 1975** – Israel acknowledges the rights of Ethiopian Jews under the Law of Return

**28 August 1975** - Official announcement of Haile Selassie's death

**12 September 1975** – Ethiopian revolutionary government initiates contacts with Israel leading towards some military cooperation

**November 1975** – UN Resolution declares Zionism as form of racism

**1977** – U.S. suspends all military aid to Ethiopia on grounds of human rights violations

**1977** – Menachim Begin Prime Minister of Israel

**April/August 1977** - Ethiopian Jews start to arrive in Israel

**July 1977** – Somali invasion of the Ogaden

**February 1978** – Ethiopia kicks out Israeli military advisors following press conference by Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan

**February 1978** – Ethiopian begins counter-offensive in Ogaden

**March 1978** – Somali forces expelled from the Ogaden

**1979** – Iran-Iraq War begins

**1979** – Camp David Accords

**April 1982** – Completion of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai

**1984-85** – Operation MOSES

**June 1989** – Ethiopia announced renewal of formal ties with Israel

**3 November 1989** – Israel and Ethiopia restore full diplomatic relations

**November 1989** – rumors of Israeli military supplies being sent to the Mengistu government in exchange for the Mengistu government not taking Ethiopian Jews hostage.

**9 November 1989** – Diplomatic ties officially renewed between Ethiopia and Israel

**Early 1990** – Mengistu allows the some Ethiopian Jews to immigrate to Israel

**22 January 1991** – Israel reopens its embassy in Addis Ababa

**21 May 1991** – Mengistu flees Addis Ababa

**23 May 1991** – Derg North Army surrenders in Asmara

**24-25 May 1991** – Operation SOLOMON

**28 May 1991** – EPRDF forces take Addis Ababa

**1 June 1991** – Meles Zenawi arrive in Addis Ababa and assume control of the Ethiopia

**April 1993** – Referendum for the secession of Eritrea

**APPENDIX B:**  
**LIST OF TERMS & ACRONYMS**

**ELF** - Eritrean Liberation Front

**EPDM** – Ethiopian Popular Democratic Movement

**EPLF** – Eritrean Popular Liberation Front

**EPRDF** – Ethiopia’s Popular Revolutionary Democratic Front

**Histadrut** – Israeli General Federation of Labor

**IDF** – Israeli Defense Force

**MASHAV** – Center for International Cooperation of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**OAU** – Organization of African Unity

**OLF** – Oromo Liberation Front

**PGE** – Provisional Government of Eritrea

**PLO** – Palestinian Liberation Organization

**PMAC** - Provisional Military Administrative Council

**TGE** – Transitional Government of Ethiopia

**TPLF** – Tigray Popular Liberation Front

**TPLF** – Tigre Popular Liberation Front

**UN** – United Nations

**USAID** – United States Agency for International Development

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